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**MILLION DOLLAR CHALLENGE GRANT BOOSTS CHICAGO'S FIRST BIKE PARK**

An anonymous donor has offered up to \$1,000,000 toward building Chicago's first urban bike park in a 2-for-1 challenge grant, says Chicago-based non-profit Friends of Big Marsh. Friends of Big Marsh has launched a crowdfunding campaign at [bigmarsh.org/build](http://bigmarsh.org/build) to leverage the grant that could provide much of the funding needed to open the first phase of the park in Spring 2016.

The park at Big Marsh, just east of the historic Pullman neighborhood, is being built by the Chicago Park District on 278 acres of slag field. The site is a remnant of the Big Steel era that dominated southeast side manufacturing through much of the 20th century.

Friends of Big Marsh coordinator Steve Buchtel says that the challenge grant will make donations at all levels more meaningful to the individuals and businesses interested in contributing to Big Marsh. "The two for one match means that a \$100 gift towards the park is worth \$300, a \$10,000 gift is worth \$30,000" says Buchtel. "It triples the impact donors can have on opening the park."

When completed through multiple construction phases, the park will include a 45-acre bike park for off-road cyclists, multi-use trails suitable for walking, running and biking, a permanent cyclocross course, the region's largest ropes course, and facilities for bird watching, archery, and events. Restoration efforts are also under way to return portions of the site to thriving marshland.

Phase 1, which includes initial ecological restoration and key elements of a 45-acre bike park, is expected to open Spring 2016 for a cost of \$8.4 million. Phase 1 is being funded through a public-private partnership between the Chicago Park District and Friends of Big Marsh. Friends of Big Marsh hopes to raise \$2.58 million for park construction from private corporations and donors.

Chicago-based bicycle component manufacturer SRAM Corp. has provided \$500,000 to Friends of Big Marsh towards the park. Outdoor clothing and equipment retailer REI has provided an additional \$100,000. The challenge grant applies only to additional funding raised, says Buchtel.

The crowdfunding campaign offers a variety of perks for donors, including pre-opening tours and events at the park, and permanent recognition opportunities. Individuals and corporations can contribute online through [bigmarsh.org/build](http://bigmarsh.org/build), or by contacting Buchtel at [friends@bigmarsh.org](mailto:friends@bigmarsh.org) or 708/365-9365.

Friends of Big Marsh is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization operating on behalf of environmental, community and recreational groups to maximize the success and community benefit of Big Marsh Park No. 564.

Partnering with the Chicago Park District and other public and private entities, Friends of Big Marsh recognizes that the potential of the park extends beyond repurposing an underutilized space. The park will improve the community through:

- Stewardship of a vibrant habitat that has long been a neglected industrial site;
- Improving public health through active and passive recreation;
- Creating a world-class venue for bicycle recreation that will benefit local youth, families and experienced athletes equally; and
- Stimulating the local economy by creating a local, regional and national draw to the park.

For more information, see [bigmarsh.org](http://bigmarsh.org) or e-mail [friends@bigmarsh.org](mailto:friends@bigmarsh.org). For Big Marsh multimedia, visit the Friends of Big Marsh [YouTube channel](#). [Photos of Big Marsh](#) can be credited to Thomas' Photographic Services. Find Friends of Big Marsh on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).