

WATERWAYS is a semiannual newsletter to inform Durham residents about various elements of the City of Durham's stormwater management program. Public Education, Stormwater Infrastructure (drainage and flooding), and Water Quality are the three main areas in Stormwater Services.



Clean Cars, Dirty Water?

Almost every weekend you can drive through Durham and see people washing their cars. Often, you can see clues that a car is being washed before you see it happening - soapy water flowing down the street. This water, along with the soap and grime it carries, is most likely running into a nearby storm drain. What most people don't realize is that this water flows straight into our rivers and creeks. It does **not** get treated first!

The grime that comes off cars can contain toxic chemicals from paint, exhaust, and brake pads. You may also wash grease and oils off your car. Even small amounts of soap can kill fish. The waste water from washing your car needs to be kept out of the storm drain. There is no problem with washing your car. It is just how and where you do it that matters.

The easiest way to clean your car in an environmentally friendly manner is to take your car to a commercial car wash. Professional car washes are better for the environment because their waste water is treated. They also use high pressure nozzles and pumps that conserve water. Car washes use about 60 percent less water to wash a car than washing it at home with a hose. Look for a car wash that recycles its waste water to be even more environmentally conscious. See www.DurhamEnviroStars.com for a list of water-friendly car washes.

If you prefer to wash your car at home, use the following tips to help protect our rivers and streams.

Tips for "Greener" Car Washing

- ⇒ Wash your car over grass or gravel. You could also wash your car where the water will drain to a landscaped or grassy area. Avoid having soapy waste water flow down the driveway or street into the storm drain.
- ⇒ Try using waterless car wash products. These don't require soapy suds or a water supply.
- ⇒ Don't let water flow the whole time you are washing. Use nozzles on your hoses that automatically turn off the water when you are not using it.
- ⇒ Use a biodegradable soap. Look for labels that say "phosphate free," "non-toxic," or "biodegradable." Avoid products with: phosphates, petroleum-distillates, kerosene, silicone or mineral spirits. Citrus or vegetable based soaps are the best choices for the environment.
- ⇒ Use the smallest amount of soap possible. Elbow grease and water can take care of most grime on a car. Using less soap not only helps the environment, it also saves you money!
- ⇒ Use a bucket of soapy water to wet your sponge or rag. Wring your sponge or rag back into the bucket to keep dirty water out of the storm drain. The water in these buckets should be disposed of in the sanitary sewer. This can be done by using an inside drain such as a sink or toilet.
- ⇒ Avoid the use of acid-based wheel cleaners.

Visit www.durhamnc.gov/stormwater for more tips on how to protect water quality!

Stormwater Citizens Participation Group

Thirty-three Durham residents have been meeting monthly to provide input to the City's stormwater management plan. Launched in December 2008, the Citizens Participation Group has met six times. The goal of the group is to offer a chance for people to comment on plans to protect local streams from polluted runoff. City staff presented key elements of the updated Stormwater Management Plan and gathered input on Water Quality Recovery Plans for Northeast Creek and Third Fork Creek watersheds.

Participants learned about "pollutants of concern" for local waterways and provided ideas on how to prioritize cleaning up the pollution. The City is required to develop Water Quality Recovery Plans for watersheds with state and federal reduction targets. Targets include a 93 percent reduction in fecal coliform for Northeast Creek and a 53 percent reduction in total suspended solids for Third Fork

Creek. Citizens felt that the plans should also address additional pollutants that have been identified as problems through state and local field testing. Low dissolved oxygen is a concern in both creeks, and high copper levels are an issue in Northeast Creek.

Nitrogen will be addressed in both creeks due to the Jordan Lake rules. Stricter controls on new development and treating stormwater draining from existing development will help reduce nutrients flowing into the lake.

Group members noted that although individuals may have different interests regarding our waterways, we all want to maintain clean, healthy streams and drinking water supplies. For more information on the state of our local waterways and how to get involved, visit www.durhamnc.gov/stormwater.

Watershed Planning Update

The City of Durham is working on watershed improvement plans for Ellerbe Creek and Third Fork Creek. The Ellerbe plan is nearing completion, while the Third Fork plan is in the beginning stages.

The purpose of a watershed plan is to evaluate conditions and prioritize projects that will improve stream health. Projects may include stream restorations, stormwater treatment devices such as wet ponds, protection of environmentally sensitive lands, and use of "Low Impact Development" practices.

Specific opportunities for projects in the Ellerbe Creek watershed were identified through field work. The projects are now being prioritized with criteria set by the planning team and interested citizens:

- Water quality benefits
- Community enhancement
- Habitat and biological improvement
- Implementation issues
- Stream bank protection
- Flood protection

The planning team is developing a model that allows staff to interactively review the effectiveness of each potential project. The City will choose projects to complete based on their ability to have the greatest positive impact on local stream health and overall watershed improvement.

