Stormwater Programs
EARTH ROUND-UP 2008

What is Stormwater?

Stormwater is the flow of water that results from precipitation just after a rainfall or snow melt. When a rain event occurs, some of the water infiltrates the soil, some is absorbed by plants, and some evaporates. The rest of the precipitation that runs off of the land and impervious areas is Stormwater.

Impervious surfaces like driveways, sidewalks, streets, and building rooftops prevent stormwater runoff from naturally soaking into the ground. Stormwater runoff often contains pollutants in quantities that could adversely affect water quality.

Stormwater can pick up debris, chemicals, dirt, and other pollutants and flow into a storm sewer system or directly to a lake, stream, river, wetland, or coastal water. Anything that enters a storm sewer system is discharged untreated into the waterbodies we use for swimming, fishing and providing drinking water.

10 Things You Can Do to Prevent Stormwater Runoff Pollution

1. Use fertilizers sparingly and sweep up driveways, sidewalks, and roads.
2. Never dump anything down storm drains.
3. Vegetate bare spots in your yard.
4. Compost your yard waste.
5. Avoid over application of pesticides and herbicides. Follow application directions carefully.
6. Direct downspouts away from paved surfaces.
7. Take your car to the car wash instead of washing it in the driveway.
8. Check your car for leaks, and recycle used motor oil.
9. Pick up after your pet.
10. Have your septic tank pumped and system inspected regularly.

What is a Riparian Buffer?

A riparian buffer is a forested area next to a stream that is left undisturbed. Riparian buffers are important for good water quality. These areas help to prevent sediment, fertilizers, pesticides, and other pollutants from reaching a stream and contaminating our water. Riparian buffers are most effective when they include deep rooted trees and shrubs in combination with native grasses. The vegetation on the stream banks helps to prevent erosion and also keeps the streams cool which is important for fish and other organisms that live in the streams. Forested buffer areas are also beneficial for deer, turkey, rabbits, songbirds, and other land animals.

These areas benefit humans too. Riparian buffers slow down floodwaters and stabilize the stream banks preventing damage to property. When floodwaters slow down, riparian areas trap sediment that build the stream banks. Sediment is the number one pollutant in Tennessee streams.

Managing a Riparian Buffer in Your Backyard

If you live on or adjacent to a stream, maintain a wide vegetated riparian buffer along the stream banks. The roots of trees and plants are the best protection from stream bank erosion. Mowing up to the stream bank or cutting streamside trees will cause banks to erode and collapse over time. Avoid straightening stream sections, allowing livestock to access the riparian zone, or plans that require heavy equipment to enter the riparian buffer.