

Parking Lots that Work to Prevent Water Pollution

Parking lots can be a source of pollution. Cars, with small oil leaks, sit in the parking lot all day. Once the car drives away there is a small shiny spots left on the pavement. Then the rain comes. The rain washes the parking lot clean, but where did the oil go?

The oil was washed directly into a storm drain into the storm sewer system. Once in the storm sewer system the polluted oil did not go to a treatment plant, rather it goes directly into the receiving water, a lake or river.

In Des Moines, one location has realized this is a possible source of pollution, and has done something about it. The Salisbury House, located at 4025 Tonawanda Drive, has built a new parking lot, which includes a special surface. This special surface has small holes in it to allow the water to enter a sand filter under the parking lot. This allows the water to slowly seep into the ground, after most of the pollutants are filtered out thorough the sand.

The Salisbury House has also changed the landscaping on the large hill south of the mansion. The new landscaping includes plants native to Iowa. These plants have long root structures that, once established, help reduce the amount of erosion occurring on the hill.

Trees Forever, a non-profit environmental organization, helped identify the Salisbury House as a participant for this project. Trees Forever is also working on projects in Yeader Creek in south Des Moines, and Living History Creek, a tributary to Walnut Creek, which traverses the government boundaries of Urbandale and Johnston.

The future projects for Yeader Creek include, neighborhood creek clean-ups, and redesigning the area downstream of the Home Depot Parking lot on E. 14th. Cleaning the creek, removing less desirable trees, and restoring the neighborhood's view of the creek will bring the neighbors closer to the creek giving them a sense of ownership and protect the creek from illegal dumping.

The redesign of the area downstream of the Home Depot Parking lot will allow for water to travel more slowly down the steep embankment adjacent to the creek. As this water travels slower the pollutants will drop out of the water onto the ground.

Occasionally it will be necessary to remove the sediment with equipment. The sediment will be placed in a landfill, where it will remain harmless.

These pilot projects are examples for other communities to demonstrate the possibilities of educating the public to keep waterways healthy.