

CONFERENCE REPORT

SMART GROWTH

for **WATER RESOURCES** CONFERENCE

HELD APRIL 2 - 3, 2025

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



Conference Planning Committee:

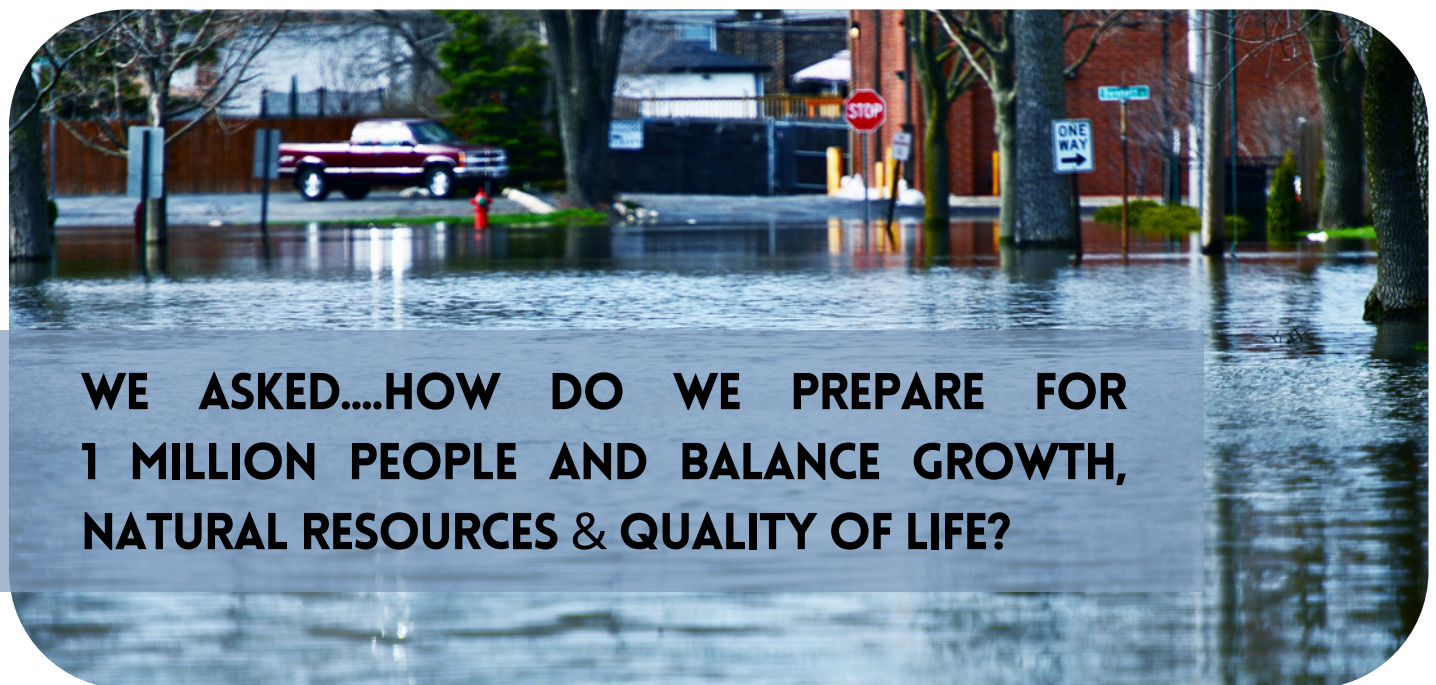


The Smart Growth for Water Resources Conference was held on April 2-3, 2025 at the Heroncrest in Elm Springs, AR. Over 170 attendees participated in the two-day event. We want to express gratitude for all our speakers, attendees, sponsors, vendors and partners who helped to make this event possible and a great success!

The following report includes:

- Key findings & themes
- Session-by-session recaps
- Actionable next steps
- Integrated stakeholder feedback

The Beaver Watershed Alliance and Illinois River Watershed Partnership look forward to continuing collaborative efforts and working towards a regional approach to watershed management.



Key Themes:

- Managing floods and stormwater in NWA watersheds
- Workshopping with experts to prepare for anticipated growth and water challenges
- Collaborative strategies for water management & NWA leadership perspectives
- Knowing the tools for water management
- On-site tours of local demonstrations
- Economics of water management
- Community outreach and engagement
- Bonus session with Center for Watershed Protection on Better Site Design + Codes and Ordinances

1. Big Takeaways from the Conference

Over two days, we tackled how Northwest Arkansas can grow smart — balancing vibrant communities, thriving economies, and clean, abundant water. From stream restoration to zoning changes, from regional collaboration to community outreach, one message rang clear:

We have the tools. We need the political will.

Top Conference Themes:

- Regional Leadership is Key – Water doesn’t stop at city lines; our solutions can’t either.
- Protect What Protects Us – Healthy streams, riparian buffers, and floodplains save us money and reduce flood risk. This is critical infrastructure to our region in the same way roads, water lines, sewer, electric, and communications are critical infrastructure.
- Make Smart Growth Easier – Developers and cities need clear codes, templates, and examples that speed approval for low-impact development (LID).
- Educate & Inspire – Outreach isn’t just for students; elected officials, inspectors, and newcomers need to understand our watershed systems. The Razorback Greenway is a great example of how to coordinate regionally, build capacity and bring the community along.
- Act Now, Not Later – We’re losing agricultural land, increasing impervious cover, and stretching infrastructure. The window for preventative action is closing.



“NWARPC works on transportation, but there is a great need for regional leadership on stormwater management.”

“NWA Council has been looking at and recognizes the need for a Council of Governments to help address regional growth pressures from stormwater, to drinking water, to housing affordability, roads, and sewer.”

Regional Leadership on Big, Bold Change with speakers Nelson Peacock, CEO and President, NWA Council and Tim Conklin, Director, NWA Regional Planning Commission, facilitated by Leif Kindberg, IRWP

2. Session Highlights

High-Level Visioning & Regional Leadership

- The state is prioritizing nutrient-impaired subwatersheds with funding through the 319 Program and State Revolving Fund.
- Regional leaders called for a Council of Governments to address shared issues like drinking water protection, housing affordability, and stormwater management.

The Power of Open Space

- Agriculture is the #1 economic driver in Washington and Benton Counties (\$1.5 billion for Washington/Benton County GDP), yet development is consuming farmland quickly.
- “Mother Nature knows what to do” — integrating agriculture into urban planning keeps the landscape productive and diverse.

Floodplain Restoration & Conservation

- 91% of Ozarks forests were logged historically, altering watersheds dramatically.
- Long-term management is as important as construction; public spaces like “The Ramble” show how restoration can also connect people to rivers.
- Natural channel restoration techniques are a great long-term solution to reduce river challenges.

Community-Led Smart Growth

- Bonny Stitt’s story: From planting natives in her yard to leading the West Fork Smart Growth Committee — proof one person can spark a movement.
- Forums showed the highest attendance when answering, “What’s going on now?” — people want actionable tasks and local updates.



What calls you to the work of Smart Growth?....

*“Witnessing the way urban spaces
take over nature.”*

Smart Growth - Opportunity for Action
Dr. Sarah Lewis, Edgewater Coaching & Bonny
Stitt, City of West Fork Planning.

Land Conservation & Easements (BMP Circuit)

- In the past five years, NWA has lost 11% of its ag land.
- Conservation easements protect property forever, with options for continued agricultural use or limited development, and preserve land in perpetuity (scenic value, identity, subdivision rights).
- NWALT has protected 9,300 acres; partnerships and grant funding are essential.

Low Impact Development in Action (BMP Circuit)

- Stormwater BMPs, urban tree plantings, porous paver installations, and detention pond retrofits show that LID works — but current codes often make it a long and expensive process for developers.
- There are many demonstration sites across NWA, watershed groups can provide more information and maintenance/technical information.

Stream & Riparian Restoration (BMP Circuit)

- Projects shared were funded by local bonds, utility partnerships, and grants. Partnerships are key.
- Focus on replacing invasive species with deep-rooted natives to improve bank stability and biodiversity.

Urban Forestry (BMP Circuit)

- Forestry programs are available, act now! Funding for city projects, technical assistance, workshops, and professionals, e.g. Arbor Day, Tree City USA.
- Having at least 30% canopy cover in an urban city can provide multiple benefits.
- Urban trees work to absorb water, reducing flooding and protecting riparian buffers.



3. Key Workshops & Lessons Learned

Streamside & Floodplain Protection

- **Define and protect streams** – Clear definitions, GIS mapping, and ordinances establish buffer zones (up to 100 feet) that balance water quality protection with property rights.
- **Set clear rules** – Streamside buffers allow activities like native planting, restoration, and utility maintenance, but prohibit grading, hazardous material storage, and new buildings in sensitive zones.
- **Floodplains as infrastructure** – Consider “No Adverse Impact” standards to maintain flood storage, reduce erosion, and limit costly damage from repetitive losses.
- **Fund the fixes** – Stormwater Utility Fees finance inspections, maintenance, and capital projects, while offering credits for low-impact development and reduced impervious cover.
- **Plan for the long haul** – A timeline of ordinances, from nutrient reduction to streamside protection and utility fees, shows how steady policy evolution strengthens resilience over time.

Comprehensive Stormwater Management

- **Stormwater is everyone’s business** – It protects water quality, reduces flood risk, and impacts downstream communities far beyond city limits.
- **Think beyond pipes** – Manage stormwater through site-level solutions (LID, rain gardens, permeable pavers), upgraded conveyance systems, and preserved natural drainage features like wetlands and riparian corridors.
- **Plan land use with water in mind** – Prioritize infill development, limit sprawl, and protect floodplains to store water, reduce erosion, and safeguard ecosystems.
- **Go regional for real results** – Create a regional stormwater management authority with shared funding, consistent regulations, and basin-wide solutions.
- **Integrate economics and ecology** – Link stormwater planning to economic growth by showing long-term savings, reduced infrastructure costs, and opportunities for nature-based development.

Springfield, MO Integrated Plan

- **Invest where it counts** – Focus funding on the most pressing water quality issues by identifying priority pollutants and high-impact solutions.
- **Measure the return** – Use Sustainable Return on Investment (SROI) analysis to weigh the long-term costs and benefits of projects like detention pond retrofits, riparian restoration, and green infrastructure.
- **Integrate planning and funding** – Tie MS4 compliance, sewer rate structures, and project selection together so every dollar advances both infrastructure needs and water quality goals.
- **Connect people to water** – Daylight streams, create public access, and restore urban waterways so communities see, value, and care for their local creeks.
- **Tell the story, build the movement** – Share successes and challenges repeatedly to grow public support and ensure water protection remains a shared, long-term priority.

4. Codes and Ordinance Workshop with Center for Watershed Protection

Center for Watershed Protection Resources for Smart Growth for Water Resources Conference www.cwp.org

Better Site Design Resources

Better Site Design: A Handbook for Changing Development Rules in Your Community, 1998
<https://owl.cwp.org/mdocs-posts/better-site-design-part-1/> <https://owl.cwp.org/mdocs-posts/better-site-design-part-2/>

Better Site Design Code and Ordinance (COW) worksheet – 2017 update

<https://owl.cwp.org/mdocs-posts/better-site-design-code-and-ordinance-cow-worksheet-2017-update/>

National Watershed Research Network Project 1: Accounting for Climate Change in Post-Construction Stormwater Standards, 2024

https://cwp.org/news_manager.php?page=38315

https://www.cwp.org/national_watershed_research_ne.php

Clean Water Certificate Training Program for Green Infrastructure Construction and Maintenance

https://www.cwp.org/clean_water_certificate.php

CWP's PA MS4 Collaboration Toolkit, 2024

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/f529174ce32843e6a3dbb2c8f9a35ee2>

CWP's YouTube with Training Videos (FREE!):

<https://www.youtube.com/@CenterforWatershed>

- Basics of Biochar
- MS4 Permit Basics
- GSI Maintenance
- Stormwater Funding and Financing
- Design with Maintenance in Mind
- Codes and Ordinance Reviews
- Mitigation Banking 101

For a list of CWP's EPA Manual Series, see appendix.



5. Stakeholder Feedback – What We Heard

Needs:

- *Regional action and/or regional task force with templates and sample ordinances.*
- *County-wide zoning and stronger septic regulations.*
- *More training for inspectors and education for city councils.*
- *More native plant nurseries and product availability for LID.*
- *Funding to implement projects and programming.*
- *Wetland and floodplain protection is a priority.*
- *Contractor partnerships.*
- *Ongoing GIS mapping of sensitive areas like floodplains and karst.*
- *Integrated stormwater management.*
- *Reduce urban sprawl.*
- *Mandated LID.*
- *Training for installation and materials + maintenance.*
- *Property tax adjustments to fund stormwater work.*
- *Agri-tourism paired with green infrastructure.*
- *Ongoing regional mapping efforts.*

Barriers:

- *Funding limitations.*
- *Product availability.*
- *Time to implement - need local champions.*
- *Public misunderstanding of density.*
- *Private property access issues.*
- *Untrained installers, uninformed contractors.*

What is most important to you in protecting NWA's natural resources?:

- *Riparian buffers, biodiversity.*
- *Rainwater recharge.*
- *Clean water - used efficiently.*
- *Having beautiful, ecologically healthy places to connect people to.*
- *Generational natural health. Providing open spaces for wildlife to maintain our ecological wellbeing.*
- *Impacts to sensitive species.*

6. Action Steps Moving Forward

Form a Regional Stormwater Task Force to carry out regional goals on stormwater – House it under a neutral convening body.

Develop & Share Templates – Codes, ordinances, and approval processes that can be adapted by any municipality (focus on floodplains and LID).

Educate Elected Officials & City Staff – Create a shared training program with CEUs.

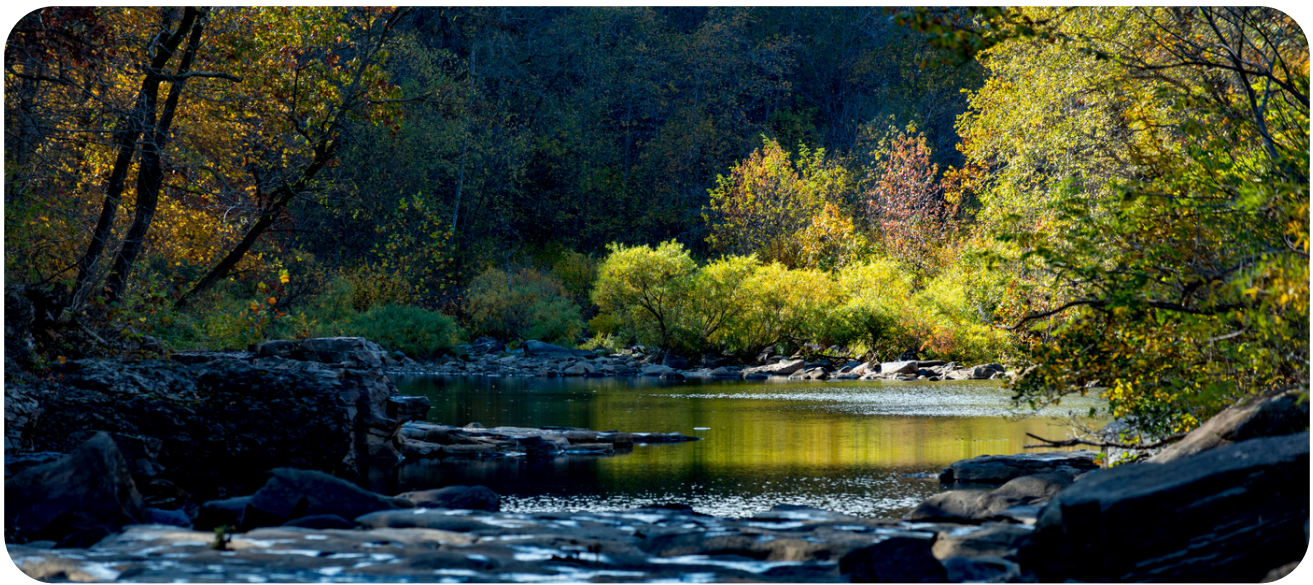
Develop How-To Resources - BMP manuals, maintenance guidance, best practices.

Expand Native Plant & LID Product Availability – Partner with nurseries and suppliers.

Promote Conservation Incentives – Outreach to landowners on easements, agrihoods, and stormwater credits.

Keep the Public Engaged – Use stories, tours, and forums to make progress visible.





7. Final Word

Northwest Arkansas is growing — fast. The choices we make now will decide whether we pass down healthy streams, clean drinking water, and green spaces to the next generation.

This conference showed we already have passionate leaders, tested solutions, and community support. The next step is turning our shared vision into coordinated, funded action.

Thank you for your participation in this program!

Funding for the Smart Growth programming is supported through the Beaver Watershed Alliance's grant project #22-500, "Smart Growth for Source Water Protection in the Beaver Lake Watershed," funded by US EPA and the Arkansas Department of Agriculture - Natural Resource Division 319 Nonpoint Source program.

8. Resources

Assistance is one call or email away! Leverage our local resources:



Beaver Watershed Alliance
info@beaverwatershedalliance.org
479-750-8007
www.beaverwatershedalliance.org



Illinois River Watershed Partnership
contact@irwp.org
479- 203-7084
www.irwp.org



Watershed Conservation Resource Center
wrcr@watershedconservation.org
479-444-1916
www.watershedconservation.org/



University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture
Cooperative Extension Service - NWA Stormwater
Education Program
479-444-1755
knowtheflownwa.com



Urban Land Institute - NWA
northwestarkansas@uli.org
501-269-8238
<https://arkansas.uli.org>



NWA Land Trust
info@nwalandtrust.org
479- 966-4666
www.nwalandtrust.org/



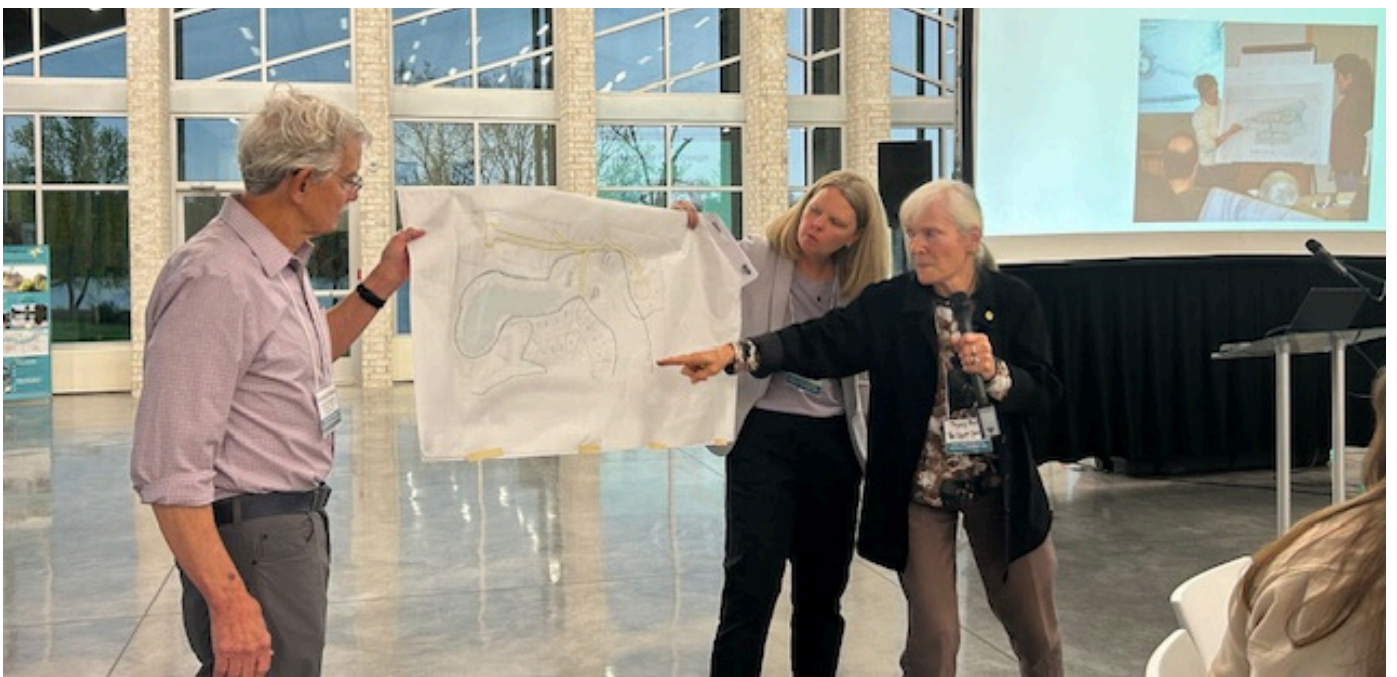
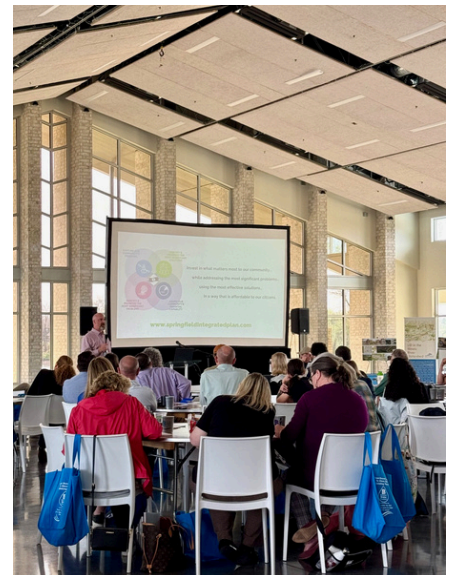
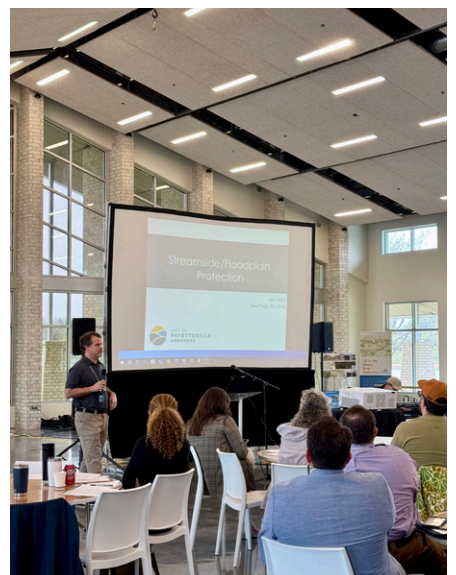
NWA Regional Planning Commission
www.nwarpc.org
479-751-7125



NWA Council
www.nwacouncil.org
479-582-2100



AR Dept of Agriculture - Natural Resources Division
(501) 682-1611
<https://agriculture.arkansas.gov/natural-resources/>





Thank you to Carrie Nelms and her students with the U of A Communications Dept. Students reached over 800 NWA residents with their Visual Preference Survey on Smart Growth!



Thank you to John Chapman, Flow State, LLC and Lance Jobe, City of Rogers for leading a tour along Osage Creek, an urban stream that has had many challenges and now a solution with restoration efforts underway.



Thank you to Lance Jobe, City of Rogers for leading a tour along downtown Rogers, showing participants a recent pervious paver install. The City has normalized pervious pavers and continues to see the benefits with reduced flooding and better public spaces.

Appendix

Sessions and Speakers

Day 1 – Collaborative Strategies

High-level Visioning & Water Quality Impacts

Speaker: Tate Wentz, Director, Arkansas Dept. of Agriculture - Natural Resources Division

Regional Leadership on Big, Bold Change + Q&A

Speakers: Nelson Peacock, CEO and President, NWA Council, Tim Conklin, Director, NWA Regional Planning Commission, facilitated by Leif Kindberg, IRWP

Power of Open Space & Smart Growth

Speaker: Wes Craiglow, Director, Urban Land Institute

Integrating Stormwater BMPs into Floodplain Restoration and Conservation

Speaker: Sandi Formica, Director, Watershed Conservation Resource Center

Best Management Practices Leadership & BMP Circuit

How do you envision NWA in 50 years?

- Land Conservation: Northwest Arkansas Land Trust, Facilitator: Evan Johnson
- Urban Forestry: Arkansas Dept. of Agriculture – Forestry Division, Facilitator: Chandler Barton
- Low Impact Development: Facilitators: Morgan Keeling, IRWP & Emily Finley, BWA
- Stream & Riparian Restoration: Watershed Conservation Resource Center, Facilitators: Jordan Forbis and Joran Holt

Smart Growth - Opportunity for Action

Speaker: Dr. Sarah Lewis, Edgewater Coaching & Bonny Stitt, City of West Fork Planning

Workshopping for Streamside & Floodplain Protection

Speaker: Alan Pugh, Certified Floodplain Manager, City Fayetteville

Comprehensive Stormwater Management at the Municipal Level and Beyond

Speaker: John McCurdy, Director of Community Development, City of Rogers

Springfield's (MO) Integrated Plan: Smarter Investments, Healthier Environment

Speakers: Tim Smith, City Springfield, MO, Errin Kemper, Director of Environmental Services
- City of Springfield, Mike Kromrey, Director, Watershed Committee of the Ozarks, Jon Jones, Wright Water Engineers

Day 2 – Know Your Tools, Tour On-site Demonstrations, Economics and Community Engagement

Engaging Communities through Stormwater & Flood Education and Outreach w/Q&A

Facilitator: Kelsey Criswell, Olsson

Speaker Roundtable:

Morgan Keeling, Associate Director, Illinois River Watershed Partnership

Becky Roark, Director, Beaver Watershed Alliance

Trish Ouei, Director of Public Affairs, Beaver Water District

Jane Maginot, Extension Agent with the University Of Arkansas System Cooperative Extension Service

Center for Watershed Protection - Codes and Ordinances Workshop for Better Site Design

Facilitator: Julie Schneider, Watershed Planner, Center for Watershed Protection, Inc.

Site Tours

Low Impact Development (LID) Demonstrations at City of Rogers

Speaker: Lance Jobe, City Engineer, City Rogers

Blossom Way Creek – Restoration Project

Speaker: John Chapman, Flow State

Appendix

CWP's EPA Manual Series

Manual 1: An Integrated Framework to Restore Small Urban Watersheds, 2005
<https://owl.cwp.org/mdocs-posts/urban-subwatershed-restoration-manual-series-manual-1/>

Manual 2: Methods to Develop Restoration Plans for Small Urban Watersheds, 2005
<https://owl.cwp.org/mdocs-posts/urban-subwatershed-restoration-manual-series-manual-2/>

Manual 3: Urban Stormwater Retrofit Practices Manual, 2007
<https://owl.cwp.org/mdocs-posts/urban-subwatershed-restoration-manual-series-manual-3/>

Manual 4: Urban Stream Repair Practices, 2004
<https://owl.cwp.org/mdocs-posts/urban-subwatershed-restoration-manual-series-manual-4/>

Manual 8: Pollution Source Control Practices
<https://owl.cwp.org/mdocs-posts/urban-subwatershed-restoration-manual-series-manual-8/>

Manual 9: Municipal Pollution Prevention/Good Housekeeping Practices, 2008
<https://owl.cwp.org/mdocs-posts/urban-subwatershed-restoration-manual-series-manual-9/>

Manual 10: Unified Stream Assessment: A User's Manual, 2005
<https://owl.cwp.org/mdocs-posts/urban-subwatershed-restoration-manual-series-manual-10/>

Manual 11: Unified Subwatershed and Site Reconnaissance: A User's Manual, 2005
<https://owl.cwp.org/mdocs-posts/urban-subwatershed-restoration-manual-series-manual-11/>

Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination: A Guidance Manual for Program Development and Technical Assessments, 2004
<https://owl.cwp.org/mdocs-posts/idde-guidance-manual/>

For questions for more information, contact Julie Schneider at jas@cwp.org



Thank you to the following Conference Planning Committee members:

Becky Roark, Executive Director, Beaver Watershed Alliance
Leif Kindberg, Executive Director, Illinois River Watershed Partnership
Wes Craiglow, Executive Director, NWA Urban Land Institute
Trish Ouei, Director of Public Affairs, Beaver Water District
Kelsey Criswell, Olsson
Rob Smith, NWA Council
Karen McCurdy, Crafton Tull