

Panel tackles storm runoff

Panel tackles storm runoff
News & Observer, The (Raleigh, NC)
News B3
Sam LaGrone Staff Writer

Published: November 14, 2007

RALEIGH -- To combat the impact of runoff on Wake County's rivers and streams, a task force Tuesday called for strictly enforcing stormwater rules and highlighting future flood-prone areas for municipal planners.

That's part of a nine-point plan the task force made to Wake commissioners. Carrying out the recommendations would cost \$7.8 million.

Rapid development in Wake County over the past decade has increased the number of concrete- and asphalt-covered surfaces that water cannot penetrate, such as parking lots, roads and buildings. During heavy rain, construction can choke streams and rivers with runoff.

The task force plan is designed to minimize erosion, stream pollution and flooding caused by heavy rain.

"Stormwater is a threat, even in a drought," said Kenn Gardner, county commissioner and chairman of the task force, which was made up of county staff members, elected officials and representatives from Wake cities and towns.

On Monday, the commissioners will vote on whether to adopt the task force recommendations, which focus on enforcing existing regulations over creating new ordinances.

Who pays?

The majority of the five-year plan will be paid for with \$4.5 million in fees assessed on new construction projects, officials said. The county will pitch in an additional \$2.6 million, with the municipalities contributing \$730,000.

The \$7.8 million will be in addition to money the county and the municipalities already spend on stormwater controls, which was \$17 million in 2005. Raleigh paid the bulk of this cost.

If the recommendations are approved, the first step will be to create models of either Marks Creek or Poplar Creek, said Thomas Esqueda, environmental services director for Wake County.

The computer models would predict expansions in the flood plain, and give county and city planners a better idea of where proposed development could be at risk for flooding. Following soon after would be the stormwater call center, which officials plan to finance and staff in the 2009 fiscal year.

Upper Neuse Riverkeeper Dean Naujoks said the recommendations from the task force are a good step, especially the stormwater call center.

"It's confusing for the average citizen to know who to call," Naujoks said. "I'm tired of having to do it for the

Panel tackles storm runoff

counties and municipalities in the first place."

To aid in stormwater reporting, the Riverkeepers have created the Muddy Water Watch program, training citizens to report runoff from construction sites.

Feds require a plan

The Wake County recommendations follow a federal requirement of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System. Towns with fewer than 100,000 people must implement basic stormwater rules that regulate sediment and erosion controls. Currently, the towns of Wendell and Zebulon don't have any stormwater ordinance.

###

###

WHAT THEY SAID

Wake County Stormwater Task Force recommendations:

- Create an extensive computer model of drainage basins in the county.
- Pay closer attention to construction sites prone to erosion.
- Establish stormwater ordinances in towns that have no regulations.
- Create a call center so residents countywide can report stormwater problems to a single number.
- Increase public education on flooding dangers and what property owners can do to minimize stormwater damage.
- Hire more staff to monitor construction for stormwater problems and issue fines.

The report is online: www.wakegov.com/water/watershed/taskforce.

Copyright 2007 by The News & Observer Pub. Co.