

Rain as a resource



Franz, left, Petra, and Sarah Wohlgemuth, help plant the new bioswale at Creekside Park in Coldstream as part of River's Day celebrations. The bioswale is designed to catch and divert storm water, and naturally filter it before it runs into Coldstream Creek.

Maria Besso

By [Tom Fletcher - Lake Country Calendar](#)

Published: **November 02, 2011 1:00 PM**

Updated: **November 02, 2011 1:24 PM**

By Trina Koch

As the Okanagan's rainy season approaches, it's a good time to talk stormwater!

Ever wonder what happens to water once it gurgles down the storm drain in front of your house?

Many people, especially those growing up before the days of yellow fish painted beside storm sewers, probably never gave it much thought. In fact, that storm drain was, and still is for some, a handy method of getting rid of water used to wash off driveways, cars, paintbrushes and more. And what

about all that oily rainwater flowing down the road and into the storm drain? Surely, all this run-off must go to the treatment plant right?

Actually, no. Water and everything else that enters municipal storm drains in the Okanagan, flows directly into our creeks and lakes – without treatment. Of course, these creeks and lakes are also home to local fish and other aquatic creatures, provide water for wildlife and drinking water for many residents. Pollutants in stormwater can hurt water quality and result in health risks to humans and wildlife.

In a number of Okanagan communities, local governments and residents are working together to ensure the water that enters the storm sewers, and ultimately our creeks and lakes, is as clean as possible.

Municipal government efforts include projects for rain collection, removing pollutants and preventing slope-failure which can result in the silting of our water. A number of communities are building bioswales and restoring wetlands, which clean stormwater by naturally filtering the water through vegetation. And vegetation is also being planted to stabilize slopes. For example, the District of Coldstream has taken some initial steps in stormwater treatment by building a bioswale and planting riparian plants at Creekside Park.

Many residents are also doing their part to keep our stormwater clean. Here are a few ideas:

- Install rain barrels, down spout flash guards or rain chains to direct and collect rainwater for re-use in your garden.
- Paver stones, used in the construction of walkways and driveways, allow rainwater to sink into the spaces between stones and into the ground. On an asphalt driveway, an asphalt berm, known as a waterbar (like a little speed bump) can be added to slow and spread run-off to vegetated or mulched (wood or gravel) areas.
- If you need to wash your vehicle, do it at a car wash that recycles its water and treats it before returning it to the environment. If you must give your vehicle a quick wash at home, do it on the lawn. The lawn will act as a natural filter that removes many of the chemicals before the water makes its way back to our streams and lakes.
- Dispose of hazardous materials at appropriate disposal locations. For more information, check out the waste reduction department of your regional district:
- Remove pet waste from your property to prevent it from washing into the nearest storm drain.

For more ideas around your home, check out the OBWB's new "Slow it. Spread it. Sink it! An Okanagan Homeowner's Guide to Using Rain as a Resource." The guide is available online, at www.okwaterwise.ca.

11/7/11

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Okanagan WaterWise is an initiative of the Okanagan Basin Water Board. For more on Okanagan WaterWise, visit www.okwaterwise.ca.