

Reston Will Repair 14 Miles of Eroded Streams

Five-Year Project to Improve Water Quality

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Reston will embark on a watershed restoration project next month intended to repair 14 miles of severely eroded streams, lure back long-missing organisms and send cleaner runoff into nearby lakes, rivers and bays.

Runoff systems built in the 1960s and '70s long channeled the town's storm water directly into streams, causing them to deepen over time, surge with each rain and eventually deteriorate to an "unacceptable ecological condition," said officials with the Reston Association, which owns and maintains the planned community's lake and stream system.

To stem the speed and volume of water flows, workers will begin Feb. 12 to reinforce steeply eroded banks and fill in and raise the bottoms of the streambeds, officials said. They also will re-plant trees, shrubs and grasses to help stabilize the banks. The 14-mile project is expected to be finished in five years, and officials said the association plans to eventually restore the rest of Reston's 19 miles of stream.

"The better water quality that we have in our lakes and in our streams, it improves water quality going in Difficult Run, Colvin Run, and ultimately the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay," said Larry Butler, parks and recreation director for the Reston Association.

The project's first phase will cost \$65 million to \$70 million, officials said. But Reston residents won't have to pay it. The work will be completed by a private company that specializes in restoring damaged stream systems and funded through a federally coordinated program known as a "stream mitigation bank."

The program allows private agencies to restore degraded streams in return for the right to sell "credits" to developers who, to pursue their projects, are required by federal officials to alleviate detrimental impacts to streams. The Reston stream bank has sold some credits to the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, which is building a runway at Dulles International Airport, said Frank Graziano, a senior engineer with Wetland Studies and Solutions, which will do the restoration work.

The company, not local officials, will be responsible for selling the credits, Butler said. It also must monitor the restoration work for 10 years after its completion and make repairs if something goes wrong during that time, he said.

Reston's streams have become so degraded that they are nearly devoid of some organisms, such as mayflies and stoneflies, that are common in healthy streams, said Nicki Foremsky, the Reston Association's watershed supervisor.

"I'm sure once the restoration project is finished, we will have the abundance of vegetation that the bugs like," she said. "We'll just need the [bugs] to want to go there."

Construction will begin on four miles of Snakeden Branch, adjacent to United Christian Parish church off Colts Neck Road, and later move to Glade and Colvin runs, officials said. The project will be coordinated with Reston Association staff members and will be overseen by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

The project might save Reston money in the long run, officials said. Because runoff from the eroded streams is so dense, the association must dredge runoff soil from Lake Audubon every seven years or so, at a cost of about \$750,000, Butler said.

"We hope with this stream restoration project to have little to no erosion, so that it would alleviate the cost or the frequency of having to dredge," Foremsky said. "If we have more time in between there, it saves everyone money . . . and the boaters and the wildlife and the fish all would appreciate it."



A Reston watershed restoration project intended to repair 14 miles of eroded streams will begin on four miles of Snakeden Branch, left, next month. Reston officials want its streams to look like the stream below, which Wetland Studies and Solutions restored in 2003. (Courtesy Of Reston Association)



(Courtesy Of Wetland Studies and Solutions, Inc.)