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Greener Infrastructure Manages Stormwater In D.C.

By: Sabri Ben-Achour // October 6, 2011

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D.C.'s Department of the Environment is looking to stem the overflow of stormwater, which can flush oil, heavy metals and other pollutants into the Anacostia River.

Under a new agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency, developers and the District of Columbia will be using greener infrastructure to manage its stormwater problem.

"Green roofs, we'll plant roughly 4000 trees a year, we'll be putting in more rain barrels, rain gardens, bioretention swales -- channeling stormwater into places where it can be absorbed and not just shoot out," says Christophe Tulou, director of D.C.'s Department of the Environment.

These additions, which have transformed Yards Park in southeast D.C. into a place overgrown with grasses and trees, are designed to capture stormwater which would otherwise flush heavy metals, dirt, oil and smog into the Anacostia river. Tulou says the city will be getting a lot more of these and other forms of natural infrastructure.

This is under the new stormwater permit designed by the EPA. The permit requires that any new development or redevelopment retain the first 1.2 inches of rain fall in a storm and use it -- to flush toilets or to water gardens, for example.

Some developers worry they won't be able to do that in highly built-up D.C. The city says its regulations will be flexible, and builders may be able to pay for upgrades elsewhere in the city to offset their own development.

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