AWARE COLORADO

Addressing Water And Natural Resource Education

League of Women Voters
of Colorado
Education Fund

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NEMO National Network

COMMUNITY AWARENESS REVIEW SHEET

How well does your community protect water quality?

Local land use decision makers play a critical role in preventing pollution and protecting water quality in Colorado. They are in a unique position to proactively incorporate water quality protection in land use decisions.

Preventing pollution at the source through wise planning is the best, most effective approach to protect water resources. Many strategies related to transportation infrastructure, community design criteria, landscaping and tree cover, among others, can help communities protect water quality while accommodating growth and development.

What is polluted runoff and why is it a problem in my community?

Polluted runoff, also known as nonpoint source pollution, occurs when contaminants are picked up by rainwater, snowmelt or landscape irrigation, then carried off to be deposited in lakes, rivers and streams. Some examples are: oil and sand from roads, sediment from disturbed soil, lawn and garden products, and toxic materials from urban and suburban areas.

Polluted runoff can have a number of negative impacts on water quality. For example, increasing the sediment and nutrient loads upsets nature's balance in streams and lakes. Metals and other toxic chemicals in polluted runoff negatively impact aquatic life and human health. Finally, polluted runoff can introduce bacteria, viruses and other pathogens into local water bodies.

This review sheet can help you evaluate your community's efforts to prevent polluted runoff and incorporate water protective strategies in development projects.

For more information about these strategies contact

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How well does your community protect water quality?

Section 1 – Evaluate your community's efforts to protect water quality

- Are environmentally sensitive areas identified, and are strategies to mitigate impacts of land use on water quality encouraged? (See section two below.)
- Are adequate buffers established to protect creeks, streams, ponds, wetlands and other sensitive areas?
- Are natural drainages preserved to the extent possible?
- Is phased development encouraged to minimize soil disturbance and compaction?
- Are steps taken to reduce the amount/impact of impervious surfaces such as paved parking lots?

Section 2 – Some strategies to consider for specific development projects

Reduce the impacts of streets and roads
- Allow narrower road templates that include parking pullouts
- Minimize on-street parking (e.g. allow parking on one side of the street only)
- Incorporate swales in street and road design
- Use porous paving materials in low-traffic areas such as fire lanes and road shoulders

Reduce impervious surfaces created by cul-de-sacs
- Keep the number and size of cul-de-sacs to a minimum
- Incorporate landscaping in cul-de-sac design
- Use alternative turnaround designs, like T-shaped hammerheads or loop roads

Include water-protective sidewalk and trail designs
- Design sidewalks and trails based on anticipated need and/or usage
- Use porous materials for sidewalks and trails
- Use landscaped areas to "disconnect" sidewalks from the street

Include strategies to reduce impacts from driveways
- Incorporate shared driveways
- Use porous materials for driveways

Prevent polluted runoff from parking lots
- Base parking lot size on anticipated actual demand
- Incorporate shared parking when practicable
- Use porous paving materials in low traffic areas such as overflow parking and snow storage areas
- Disconnect impervious surfaces with vegetated areas or porous paving materials

Incorporate landscaping methods to prevent water quality impacts
- Save and reuse topsoil on site or amend soil with organic matter
- Minimize turf grass and include drought-tolerant species or Xeriscaping in landscape design
- Preserve existing trees when possible and plant new ones to replace any that must be removed