Partnership Effort to Build Green Infrastructure Along Lick Run Corridor, Cincinnati, Ohio

Cincinnati is one of about 772 cities in the U.S. that have combined sewer systems with only one set of sewer pipes that handle both wastewater and stormwater. These combined sewer systems can convey wastewater and stormwater to area treatment plants in dry weather, but during rain events there is too much volume for the sewers to handle. The sewers overflow, releasing a mixture of stormwater and untreated wastewater into receiving waters. These discharges, called combined sewer overflows (CSOs), are a major water pollution concern for these cities. Even in cities with separate sewer pipes for wastewater and stormwater, the large volumes of stormwater and pollutants that are discharged during wet weather events can have substantial adverse effects on lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands.

Cincinnati's Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD) reached an agreement on a substantial list of projects to reduce CSO discharges. The agreement allows the sewer district to substitute green infrastructure solutions for conventional "grey infrastructure" control measures, provided the same level of CSO control can be ensured. MSD is working on plans for several projects that involve using green infrastructure to meet CSO control commitments. EPA is providing significant assistance to MSD during its planning work.

Region 5 provided $65,000 in Targeted Brownfields Assessment funding to conduct area-wide Phase I environmental site assessments on more than 60 parcels in the targeted corridor. In addition, EPA's Land Revitalization Program provided $40,000 through the Partnership for Sustainable Communities initiative to strengthen MSD's overall planning efforts.

One project MSD is evaluating is in the South Fairmont area of Cincinnati, in a corridor known as Lick Run. MSD is exploring strategies to keep stormwater out of the combined sewer system. Instead, stormwater will be conveyed to Mill Creek via a new above-ground channel. This will free up capacity in the sewer system and reduce CSO discharges. The new green corridor would be a significant amenity for the neighborhood and could spark commercial and economic revitalization in the area. EPA Brownfields and Land Revitalization funds are being used to support MSD's planning work, including site assessments of properties in the corridor and planning of action steps to bring the concept to fruition.

EPA invited the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Transportation to help focus transportation and community development resources on the affected neighborhood. This interagency partnership is an outgrowth of the national Partnership for Sustainable Communities among the three agencies. The agencies hope to develop a strategy to increase habitat, clean up brownfields, and reduce the supply of vacant land in the area.

Proposed Lick Run redevelopment in Cincinnati