



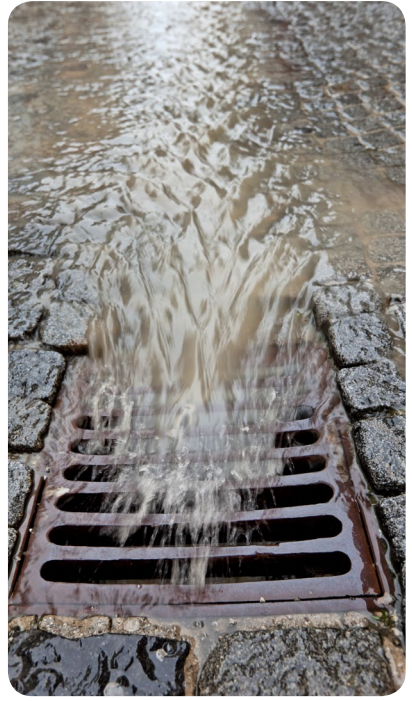
Different
SHADES
of *green*



GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE RESEARCH
at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

The Problem with *Water Runoff*

Conventional stormwater infrastructure, or gray infrastructure, is largely designed to move stormwater away from urban areas through pipes and conduit. Runoff from these surfaces can overwhelm sewer systems and end up contaminating local waterways. When stormwater runs off impervious streets, parking lots, sidewalks, and rooftops, it moves pollutants such as motor oil, lawn chemicals, sediments, and pet waste to streams, rivers, and lakes. Runoff flows can also cause erosion and flooding that can damage property, infrastructure, and wildlife habitat. In addition to runoff problems, impervious surfaces also prevent water from penetrating the soil and recharging groundwater supplies.



What is *Green Infrastructure*?

Green infrastructure uses plants, soils, landscape design, and engineered techniques to retain, absorb, and reduce polluted stormwater runoff. Green infrastructure prevents or reduces the amount of runoff that flows directly into storm drains and can be a vital tool for cities to address combined sewer overflows and nutrient impairment. It provides many environmental, social, and economic benefits that promote urban livability, such as improved surface water quality, water conservation, and improved aesthetic and property value. EPA is developing innovative tools for communities to use for planning and installing green infrastructure for achieving its many benefits.





Types of *Green Infrastructure Practices*

Permeable Pavements are porous paved surfaces that allow rain to infiltrate into soils. Permeable pavements can be constructed from various materials such as pervious concrete, porous asphalt, and permeable interlocking pavers.

Rain Gardens are depressed areas in the landscape, planted with grasses, flowers, and other plants, that collect rain water from a roof, driveway, or street and allows it to infiltrate into the ground. Rain gardens can also help filter out pollutants in runoff and provide food and shelter for butterflies, song birds, and other wildlife. More complex rain gardens with drainage systems and amended soils are often referred to as bioretention cells.

Bioretention Cells (or Bioswales) are depressions that contain vegetation grown in an engineered soil mixture placed above a gravel drainage bed which slow, infiltrate, and filter runoff. They provide storage, infiltration, and evaporation of both direct rainfall and runoff captured from surrounding areas. As linear features, bioretention cells are particularly well suited to being placed along streets and parking lots.

Vegetative Swales are channels or depressed areas with sloping sides covered with grass and other vegetation. They slow down the conveyance of collected runoff and allow it more time to infiltrate the native soil beneath it.

Infiltration Trenches are narrow ditches filled with gravel that intercept runoff from upslope impervious areas. They provide storage volume and additional time for captured runoff to infiltrate the native soil below.

Green Roofs are a variation of a bioretention cell. Green roofs have a soil layer laying atop a special drainage mat material that conveys excess percolated rainfall off of the roof. They contain vegetation that enable rainfall infiltration and evapotranspiration of stored water. Green roofs are particularly cost-effective in dense urban areas where land values are high and on large industrial or office buildings where stormwater management costs are likely to be high.

Planter Boxes are structures with vertical walls and open or closed bottoms filled with gravel, soil, and vegetation that collect and absorb runoff. They are ideal for space-limited sites in dense urban areas.

Rainwater Harvesting systems, such as rain barrels and cisterns, collect and store rainfall for later use. These systems provide a renewable water supply and can slow and reduce runoff. Rainwater harvesting can reduce demands on increasingly limited water supplies in arid regions.

Rooftop (Downspout) Disconnection allows rooftop rainwater to discharge to pervious landscaped areas and lawns instead of directly into storm drains. You can use it to store stormwater and/or allow stormwater to infiltrate into the soil. Downspout disconnection could be especially beneficial to cities with combined sewer systems.

Urban Tree Canopies intercept rain in their leaves and branches, thereby reducing and slowing stormwater runoff.





Integrating *Green Infrastructure Practices*

Green Parking integrates green infrastructure elements such as permeable pavements and rain gardens into a parking lot design. Such structures manage stormwater on site, mitigate urban heat islands, and create a more pedestrian-accessible environment.

Green Streets and Alleys integrate green infrastructure elements such as bioswales, planter boxes, and trees into street and alley design. Green streets and alleys are designed to store, infiltrate, and evaporate and transpire stormwater while adding aesthetics to landscapes.

Protecting Existing Green Spaces

In addition to green infrastructure practices, communities can also address water quality and flooding impacts of urban stormwater by protecting open spaces and sensitive natural areas within and adjacent to a city while providing recreational opportunities for city residents. Natural areas that should be a focus of these land conservation efforts include riparian areas, wetlands, and steep hillsides.



Environmental and Economic Benefits of Green Infrastructure

Introducing green infrastructure to communities has many environmental and economic benefits. Green infrastructure can be a cost-effective approach to improve water quality and help communities stretch their infrastructure investments further by providing multiple environmental, economic, and community benefits.

Examples of environmental benefits:

- Improved water quality and increased water supply
- Reduced flooding
- Improved air quality
- Greater resilience to climate change
- Increased habitat improvement and connectivity
- Healthier communities

Examples of economic benefits:

- Increased property values
- Reduced filtration costs
- Infrastructure cost savings
- Reduced private and public costs



Green Infrastructure Research

EPA's green infrastructure research supports the increased adoption of both constructed and natural green infrastructure into communities.

Models and decision support tools

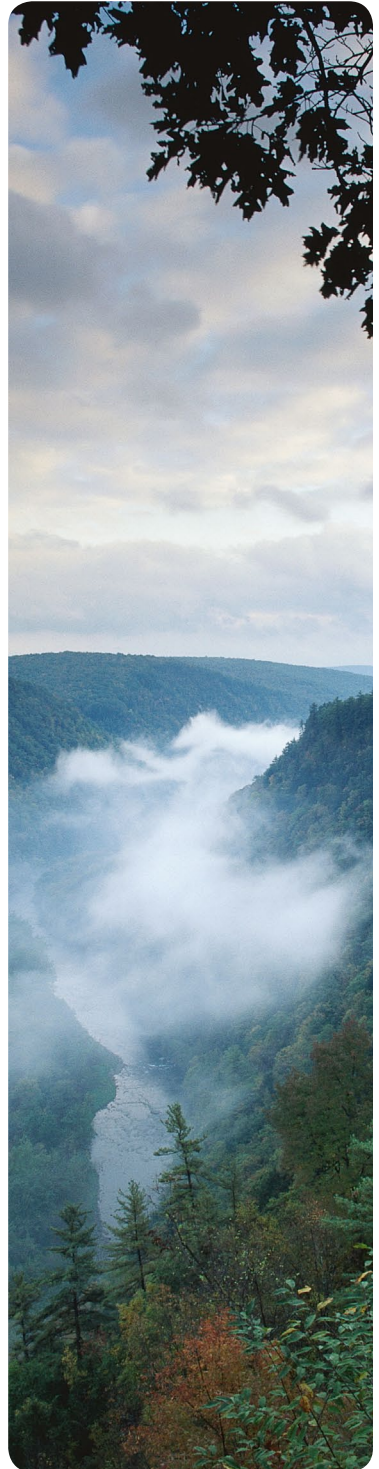
EPA researchers are analyzing and refining existing models and tools designed to increase green infrastructure practices in communities. This research will support decision-makers and allow further inclusion of green infrastructure practices into management plans that support sustainability goals.

Impacts of green infrastructure on groundwater resources

EPA is researching the impacts of green infrastructure on groundwater resources to provide the basis for long-term research on the efficacy of green infrastructure as a best management practice for water resources enhancement, particularly in arid and semiarid regions.

Assessment of risks posed to natural wetlands used for wastewater and stormwater management

EPA is reviewing the impacts of wastewater and stormwater on natural wetlands and riparian areas. This research will help guide decisions by regions, states, tribes, and local municipalities when incorporating green infrastructure with natural wetlands and riparian areas as part of stormwater and wastewater management plans.





EPA Research *in Action*

Urban Soil Assessment

Sewer system overflows can put cities in violation of the Clean Water Act. EPA researchers developed soil survey assessment protocol to identify the urban imprint on major US soils. The research helps urban planners, land managers, and sewer districts understand the potential for soils to support green infrastructure applications. It provides an overview of urban soils and offers recommendations for how soils can be rehabilitated to support green infrastructure or urban agriculture.

Transforming Cleveland's Vacant Lots

Based on technical guidance from EPA experts, Cleveland, Ohio has incorporated a green infrastructure pilot program into their CSO control plan. This program takes advantage of the city's excess vacant land, turning that land into green spaces that can soak up stormwater and keep excess water out of the sewer system.

The transformation of urban vacant lots into park-like gardens that catch stormwater runoff not only helps remedy the CSO problem, but also improves the social and economic fabric of neighborhoods lacking green spaces.

Daylighting Streams to Improve Water Quality

Researchers compared the effectiveness of buried streams (streams that are paved over or routed into underground pipes during urban development) and open-air or daylighted streams at removing harmful nitrogen. The research

shows daylighted streams are more effective at removing nitrates due to interactions with plants and other organic matter that feed on nitrates. Daylighting streams could prove to be a sustainable method for removing nitrogen and improving water quality.

Green Infrastructure at Fort Riley

Researchers with EPA's Net Zero Program are working with the U.S. Army, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Kansas Unified School District 475, and other partners to demonstrate and assess green infrastructure technologies and performance at Fort Riley, an Army base in Kansas. EPA researchers are testing a permeable parking lot at Seitz Elementary School, which is located on Fort Riley. Researchers will measure how much rainwater passes through the pavement, how fast the permeable pavement clogs with debris, and changes in groundwater chemistry. They are also monitoring the school's existing stormwater-capture-use system, which is a set of storage tanks that capture rain runoff. For this part of the study, researchers are measuring the amount of rooftop runoff that is captured and the chemistry of the water stored in the tanks.

Cincinnati Green Infrastructure Efforts

The Lick Run stream in Cincinnati, Ohio is a part of a combined sewer system that spills its polluted mixture into the nearby Mill Creek during storm events. EPA researchers collaborated with the local sewer district to monitor and adjust several green infrastructure early success projects that are designed to reduce the amount of stormwater entering combined sewers and put it to good use elsewhere.



Images above: vacant lot before and after transformation to green space and pervious pavement.

EPA *Models and Tools*

EPA is developing innovative tools, technologies, and strategies for communities to manage water resources with green infrastructure to move toward more natural hydrology and increased resilience to future changes such as climate and extreme events.

Green Infrastructure Wizard (GIWiz)

GIWiz is an interactive web application that connects communities to EPA green infrastructure tools and resources. GIWiz provides users with customized reports containing EPA tools and resources they select, direct links, and overview information about each.

Watershed Management Optimization Support Tool (WMOST)

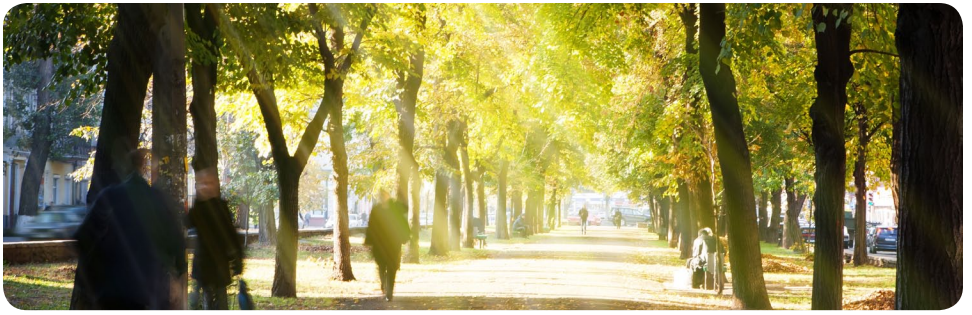
WMOST is a software application designed to facilitate integrated water resource management across wet and dry climate regions. The tool allows water-resource managers and planners to screen a wide range of practices, including low impact development or green infrastructure, across a watershed for cost-effectiveness as well as environmental and economic sustainability.

Visualizing Ecosystems for Land Management Assessment (VELMA)

VELMA is a computer software eco-hydrological model used to quantify the effectiveness of natural and engineered green infrastructure management practices for reducing nonpoint sources of nutrients and contaminants in streams, estuaries, and groundwater.

Storm Water Management Model (SWMM)

SWMM models hydrology and hydraulics to simulate the movement of water through the landscape and into and through sewer systems. A green infrastructure module was added to SWMM in 2010 to simulate the integration of green infrastructure practices, ranging from green roofs to permeable parking lots, into a community's stormwater management plan. SWMM is widely used throughout the world and considered the "gold standard" in the design of urban wet-weather flow pollution abatement approaches, and allows users to include any combination of low impact development/green infrastructure controls to determine their effectiveness in managing stormwater and sewer overflows.



SWMM Climate Adjustment Tool (SWMM-CAT)

SWMM was updated to include a software utility that allows future climate change projections to be incorporated into modeling. SWMM-CAT provides a set of location-specific adjustments derived from World Climate Research Programme global climate change models. SWMM-CAT accepts monthly adjustment factors for climate-related variables that could represent the potential impact of future climate changes.

National Stormwater Calculator (SWC)

The SWC is a desktop application designed to help support local, state, and national stormwater management objectives using GI practices. The primary focus of the SWC is to inform site developers on how well they can meet a desired stormwater retention target, but it can also be used by landscapers and homeowners. In January 2014, it was updated to include the ability to analyze different future climate change scenarios. Users can apply these different scenarios to determine how well GI increases the resiliency of stormwater management approaches to a changing climate. The SWC was mentioned in President Obama's Climate Action Plan and is now a resource for LEED Project Credit 16 (Rainwater Management) certification by the U.S. Green Building Council for projects that are designed to reduce runoff volume and improve water quality of a site.

Greening EPA

EPA has buildings in over 40 locations across the country that are committed to promoting the Agency's mission to protect human health and the natural environment by incorporating sustainability wherever possible. To support this commitment and provide an opportunity for needed research, EPA constructed an experimental parking lot with rain gardens as part of a long-term research project to quantify the effects of different permeable surfaces on stormwater runoff and the ability of rain gardens to accept, store and infiltrate stormwater.

Additional Information:

Green Infrastructure Research:

<https://www.epa.gov/water-research/green-infrastructure-research>

Green Infrastructure Overview:

<https://www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure>

Greening EPA:

<https://www.epa.gov/greeningepa>

Contact:

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