

Clean Water Strategies

For a “green and growing” Capital Region

BY JOHN IMES

The renewed focus on the quality of our lakes, streams and drinking water should cause us to rethink the traditional and prescriptive-driven solutions of the past, and examine innovative strategies and policies that can help clean our waters.

Fortunately, the use of green infrastructure, environment-focused, performance-based strategies and new directions in environmental governance can help us achieve the water quality and healthy economic climate we deserve.

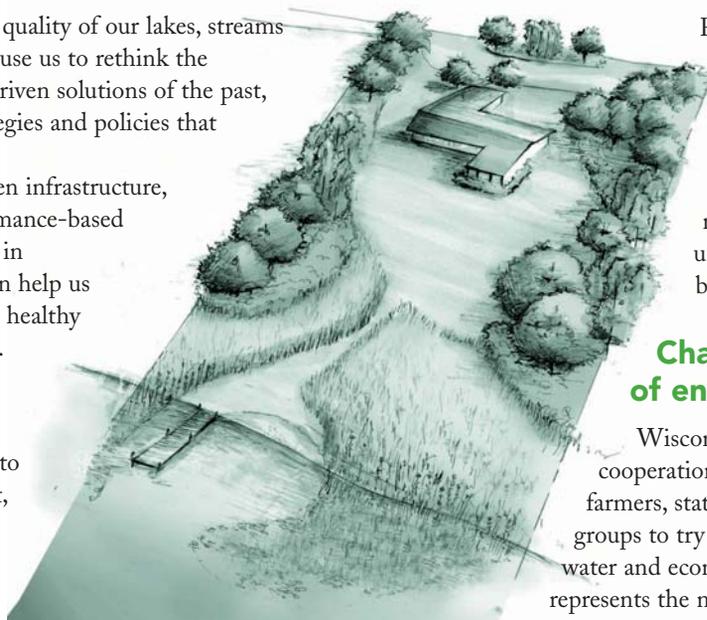
Green Urbanism

Leading cities are turning to green roofs, porous pavement, drainage swales, rain gardens and other green infrastructure to slow, absorb and cleanse their stormwater runoff.

Defined as any roof substantially covered with vegetation, green roofs can retain one or more inches of rainfall, reduce heating and cooling costs up to 50 percent, double a roof's life, and contribute to a quieter, healthier, more sustainable urban environment. Similarly, porous pavement, drainage swales and desealing (taking up impermeable concrete and asphalt in key run-off areas and replacing it with landscape or porous pavement) will help slow or absorb stormwater.

Communities might offer incentives to property owners such as reduced fees or density bonuses for developers who incorporate green infrastructure. Imagine, for example, a “green mile” of roofs along State Street showcasing the potential of cutting-edge stormwater management techniques that restore habitat, slow and cleanse runoff, and create a unique setting that attracts new development and high-paying jobs.

In his best selling book, “The Rise of the Creative Class,”



Richard Florida stresses the importance of the “quality of place” as key to attracting and retaining the knowledge workers necessary to build a high-wage economy. Green urbanism offers a mix of the built and natural environments that can create a unique setting for creative workers and businesses to thrive in.

Changing the direction of environmental policy

Wisconsin's Green Tier law can help us get cooperation from reluctant developers and farmers, state and local agencies and environmental groups to try something different to achieve clean water and economic development goals. “Green Tier” represents the next generation of environmental management with an emphasis on environmental performance, flexible compliance, legal accountability, management systems and other incentives.

One such example of a “Green Tier” type approach is the effort to clean up the polluted Charles River in Boston. Using a collaborative, performance-based strategy, businesses and government and community stakeholders came together, established time-specific environmental goals, “walked the pipes” to find causes of pollution, measured progress, and over time have improved the river's water quality so that it supports swimming, fishing and boating most of the time.

Imagine what could be done with a similar mix of creative incentives, effective and frequent progress measurements, plus unique public education and information tools to improve the region's water quality?

Moreover, while the Capital Region is blessed with a myriad of agencies and organizations, scientific expertise and committed citizen volunteers — we need to organize and coordinate these

resources in support of a more focused regional water quality effort.

We can also encourage area leaders to place a higher priority on cleaning up our waters by requiring that they wade out into the lakes each year and measure the distance they can see their feet. The Friends of Lake Wingra, for example, have set a goal that lake water should be clear enough for people to see their feet when standing waist deep.

Environmental stewardship in our own "backyard"

Each of us can play an important role by implementing best practices in our landscaping, lawn care and shoreland management to become better environmental stewards. Builders can use low-impact development strategies like silt socks, biofilters, and rain gardens to create zero-runoff development. Farmers can implement nutrient management plans and send excess manure to regional bio-energy facilities. Researchers are even finding that algae could be a fuel of the future because it is laden with oils and starches that can produce biodiesel and feeds for cattle and fish.

We can clean our waters through green infrastructure investments, stakeholder collaboration, setting environment-focused, performance-based goals, and emphasizing flexibility and accountability for water quality outcomes. We can also achieve our aspirations for an improved environment and a healthy economic climate in the Capital Region.

Green it yourself resources

- www.myfairlakes.com/what.asp — A good resource for what you can do to reduce runoff to lakes and streams.
- Lakes of Silver and Green — The Intense City-Shaping Relationship Between People and Water in Madison, Wisconsin by David Mollenhoff www.thedailypage.com/isthmus/article.php?article=7943
- Owing Waterfront Property — A Checklist (A good list of best management practices)
- www.wi-ci.org/AgLand/SHORELAND_CHKLST_03.pdf
- Consult the Green Built Home Checklist (www.greenbulthome.org) for more landscape conservation and stormwater management ideas.

Go Green!

Benefits for homeowners

- Reduced energy and maintenance costs
- Better indoor air quality
- Improved health, safety, comfort and durability
- Knowledge that homes have less environmental impact
- Market distinction for resale

Ask your builder

Benefits for the environment

- Conserves water, energy and other resources
- Energy efficient
- Renewable/recycled materials
- Less waste/long life cycle
- Environmentally minded products, materials and design practices

Information and resources:

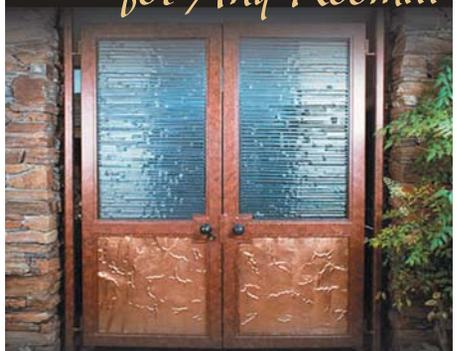
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