Why do we need to manage stormwater and polluted runoff in" Louisiana's Bayou Country"?*

Polluted stormwater runoff is a leading cause of damage to Louisiana bayous. Often, stormwater flows directly into the bayous without any treatment. This creates numerous costs to the public and to wildlife. Since we use surface water for our drinking supply the community has a vested interest in keeping these waters free of pollutants including sediment. It costs much more to clean up polluted water than clean water.

Pollution that gets into the drains can clog up the system that is intended to keep water from residences and businesses. Dirt built up in culverts and drainage conveyances limits the amount of water that the system can hold which could slow the drainage of rain water and increase the risk of flooding. Cleaning out these culverts, pipes, ditches, canals, and bayous is critical to maintaining our drainage system for flood protection, but very costly. Prevention is less expensive and decreases the taxpayer expense of cleanups and maintenance.

Polluted water hurts the wildlife in bayous and lakes. Dirt from erosion, also called sediment, covers up fish habitats and fertilizers can cause too much algae to grow, which also hurts wildlife by using up the oxygen they need to survive. Soaps hurt fish gills and fish skin, and other chemicals damage plants and animals when they enter the water.

The quantity of stormwater is also a problem. When stormwater falls on hard surfaces like roads, roofs, driveways and parking lots, it cannot seep into the ground, so it runs off to lower areas. To give you an idea of the difference a hard surface makes, consider the difference between one inch of rain falling onto a field and a parking lot. The parking lot sheds 16 times the amount of water that a field does!

Because more water runs off hard surfaces, developed areas can experience local flooding.

How are stormwater and runoff "managed"?

"Best management practices" is a term used to describe different ways to keep pollutants out of runoff and to slow down high volumes of runoff.

Preventing pollution from entering water is much more affordable than cleaning polluted water! Educating state residents about how to prevent pollution from entering waterways is one best management practice. Laws that require people and businesses involved in earth disturbing activities -- like construction -- to take steps to prevent erosion are another way to prevent stormwater pollution. There are also laws about litter, and dumping oil or other substances into storm drains.

Keeping the dirt on construction sites or pesticides from residential yards out of the storm drain is a good start. Very simple and inexpensive techniques can make a difference.

Why are people talking about stormwater?

The federal Clean Water Act requires large and medium sized towns across the United States to take steps to reduce polluted stormwater runoff. Terrebonne Parish is required to take steps to

reduce stormwater pollution in an effort to have fishable, swimmable waters.

These laws require chosen the Parish to do six things:

1) Conduct outreach and education about polluted stormwater runoff.
2) Provide opportunities for residents to participate in conversations/activities to reduce pollution
3) Detect illicit discharges (e.g. straight piping or dumping).
4) Control construction site runoff.
5) Control post-construction runoff.
6) Perform municipal housekeeping (e.g. take steps to prevent runoff from city buildings and activities.)

How does this benefit the average taxpayer?

When our water is polluted, we all pay in one way or another. Damage from urban flooding can raise merchant prices and insurance rates. Sediment and pollution laden water takes more money to treat before it can be used for drinking water. Because everyone plays a role in creating the pollution in stormwater runoff, we all have a role in cleaning it up.

What can I do to reduce the amount of stormwater pollution I contribute?

If you own a car, maintain it so it does not leak oil or other fluids. Be sure to wash it on the grass or at a car wash so the dirt and soap do not flow down the driveway and into the nearest storm drain.

If you own a yard, do not over fertilize your grass. Never apply fertilizers or pesticides before a heavy rain. If fertilizer falls onto driveways or sidewalks, sweep it up instead of hosing it away. Mulch leaves and grass clippings and place leaves in the yard at the curb, not in the street. Doing this keeps leaves out of the gutter, where they can wash into the nearest storm drain. Turn your gutter downspouts away from hard surfaces, seed bare spots in your yard to avoid erosion and consider building a rain garden in low-lying areas of your lawn

If you have a septic system, maintain it properly by having it pumped every three to five years. If it is an older system, be sure it can still handle the volume placed on it today. Never put chemicals down septic systems, they can harm the system and seep into the groundwater.

Keep lawn and household chemicals tightly sealed and in a place where rain cannot reach them. Dispose of old or unwanted chemicals at household hazardous waste collections sites or events.

Never put anything in a storm drain.

How else can I help reduce stormwater pollution in my area?

Participate in the next cleanup effort in your area. State agencies offer crab trap removal projects that are an opportunity to get into the bayous and marshes and protect the water column and fish. Storm drain stenciling events – where the destination of storm water is clearly marked on the drain – are a fun way to let your neighbors know the storm drain is only for rain. Report stormwater violations when you spot them to your local government.

* Adapted in part from materials provided by NC DEQ and graphics from Erie County , New York. Terrebonne Parish Brand is "Louisiana's Bayou Country"