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Where Does the Rain Go When We Need It? Making Rain Count for Drought Relief

By David Goldstein, Ventura County PWA

Q: Last week's rains sent fresh water cascading down storm drains into the ocean. Why not capture more of it?

A: Here are some of the public works projects capturing rain water on a large scale, and things residents can do at home to capture rain water on a smaller scale:

The United Water Conservation District's Freeman Diversion sends water from the Santa Clara River into underground aquifers, replenishing groundwater supplies. This is especially useful to protect water supplies from contamination by seawater, which breaches some overdrawn underground pools.

Public Works Agencies use pervious paving material to capture rain water in urban areas. Unlike concrete and asphalt, which cause water to run off into storm drains, pervious paving material allows water to sink into the ground. One such project, at the Ventura County Government Center, captures, treats and infiltrates stormwater runoff from a 39-acre parking lot.

The San Antonio Creek Spreading Grounds, a nearly-completed project north of Ojai, will also divert and infiltrate storm water into ground water. Construction is complete on this project, and it will go into operation after the National Marine Fisheries Service reviews flow data to ensure the Ventura County Public Works Agency will leave enough "bypass flow" in San Antonio Creek to provide for potential steelhead trout and other aquatic habitat.

Many similar projects consist of long, channeled depressions (swales) in landscape with gently sloped sides. Within the bioswale, grasses, flowering shrubs, or organic matter such as mulch slow water, allowing infiltration into soil and resulting in natural filtering of pollutants. Bioswales are often a requirement for new development.

Homeowners who want to help can redirect rain downspouts to shallow vegetated areas or gardens graded to keep and infiltrate the water onsite. Replacing concrete and asphalt with paving materials that have gaps, or removing a strip down the middle of the driveway and filling it with gravel, also allows water to flow through rather than run off.

On the net: <http://uninc.vcstormwater.org/>

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