

Runoff battle turns to the yards

DAVID COWARDIN
dcowardin@duluthnews.com

Enough runoff passed through the storm drains of Idlewild Street in Lakeside during a 1½-inch rainstorm last June to flood a football field 1 foot deep.

To reduce that runoff, and ease the flow of potentially polluted water into Lake Superior, several local agencies began putting in rain gardens, rain barrels and ditch checks this week on a two block section of Idlewild Street.

The project, a joint effort by UMD's Natural Resources Research Institute and Minnesota Sea Grant, along with help from

the Minnesota Conservation Corps, is paid for by a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency grant to Duluth. The city, along with the Western Lake Superior Sanitary District, is under federal order to stop sewage overflows into the lake.

Storm drain monitors have been in place in the Amity Creek area for a year, and after the demonstration project is finished, researchers will be able to tell how much runoff to the creek has been reduced.

NRRI research assistant Val Brady said the project also will help individual homeowners in the area with storm-water runoff problems. Water issues in the neighborhood range from swampy front yards in spring and summer to icy driveways during winter months.

See Runoff, Page B2

Brady was working Thursday at a home where two rain gardens were being developed and two rain barrels were to be installed next week. Thirty-five trees also were planted on that property in May.

As a part of the project, five homes will receive rain gardens and 20 homes will receive rain barrels free of charge.

Runoff is a particular problem in Duluth because the soil on the city's hills is full of clay and rock, which

doesn't absorb water well.

Another problem came with the city's development. Rain and melting snow used to flow gradually and evenly downhill through trees and vegetation. Now it's funneled horizontally through street gutters and storm drains into the city's many small streams, such as Amity Creek.

Consequently, the Amity Creek watershed has seen an increased amount of runoff, causing erosion and a loss of soil moisture to Lake Superior.

Adding rain gardens and rain barrels, planting trees and building ditch checks will help retain more of that water, said Jesse Schomberg, extension educator for the Sea Grant. One rain garden can hold about 200 gallons of water, and rain barrels typically store about 50 gallons.

The work will help lawns hold more water so it is not lost to Amity Creek during rainfalls. And that will help keep water levels and temperatures in the creek steady, Brady said.

Brady hopes more people will take small measures to prevent storm-water runoff.

Last week, a rain barrel sale was held at Lake Superior College and more than 1,000 barrels of 55-gallon capacity were sold.

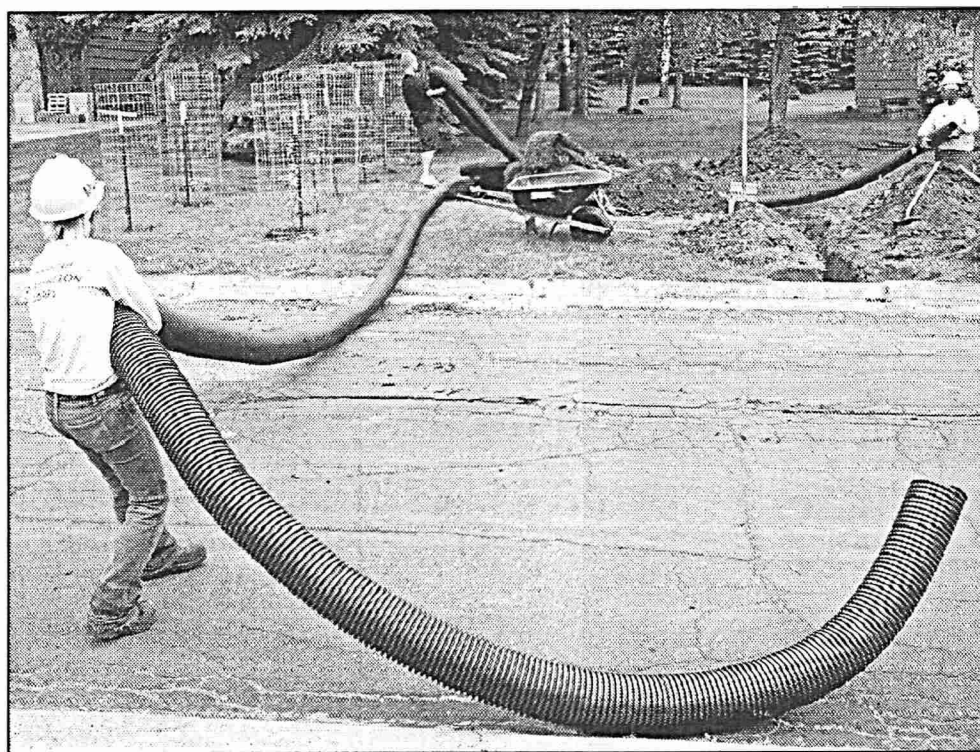




Minnesota Conservation Corps member Latasha Watson (left), 17, of St. Paul, and MCC program manager Eric Antonson remove clay from one of two rain gardens being created in a Lakeside property owner's front lawn.

TO LEARN MORE

For more information on what you can do to prevent runoff, visit lakesuperiorstreams.org.



Heather Hartfiel (from left), Jon Hedberg and Latasha Watson uncoil drainage tile that will go beneath a Lakeside rain garden. *Steve Kuchera / skuchera@duluthnews.com*



Jon Hedberg (left), a Minnesota Sea Grant intern, and Val Brady, a research assistant with the Natural Resources Research Institute, spread sand in the bottom of a rain garden's trench Thursday in Duluth's Lakeside neighborhood. The project's goal is to slow and reduce runoff and improve water quality. *Photos by Steve Kuchera / skuchera@duluthnews.com*