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Experts at N.C. Conference Examine Better Ways to Protect Water Quality

RALEIGH - Several hundred land developers and managers, builders, landscape architects, engineers and federal, state and local governmental officials will gather at the Raleigh Convention Center Wednesday and Thursday to discuss new techniques to control the runoff poisoning the state's waterways.

Stormwater is now the primary cause of polluted creeks, rivers and sounds throughout our state, and the problem continues to grow worse despite decades of regulations meant to control dirty runoff. Many communities in the state have recently turned to new techniques called low impact development, or LID, that are often cheaper and more effective at controlling runoff than conventional methods such as holding ponds.

LID includes a wide range of techniques, from a simple barrel connected to a downspout to collect rainwater that is then used to irrigate a garden, to elaborate artificial wetlands meant to absorb and treat runoff from a large area. All the techniques try to mimic the land's natural ability to absorb excess rain in order to reduce the amount of runoff from its source.

Realizing the untapped potential of LID, state water quality officials made a formal commitment in 2012 to encourage the use of these techniques.

A partnership between state agencies, the N.C. Coastal Federation, N.C. State University, development interests, local governments and private engineering firms then emerged to develop technical guidance and standardized permit tools to simplify the use of LID as an alternative stormwater management approach that is frequently much more effective than conventional stormwater collection and treatment systems.

This partnership has also worked with local governments and development professionals to identify obstacles to the use of LID and to find timely and cost-effective solutions to those impediments. It has also devised a new guidebook that helps communities to plan for how to restore degraded watersheds to improve water quality.

All these new tools and practices will be featured next week at the North Carolina Low Impact Development Summit.

About 300 participants are expected for the two-day event. They include representatives of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, local and state stormwater managers, engineers, landscape architects, academic experts and interested people. There will also be 20 professional business exhibitors. Pre-registration is close to capacity.

Specifically the summit will feature:

- Presentations by national speakers, state government leaders, research experts and development professionals on the emerging topic of LID.
- Unveiling of standardized tools, permitting options and successful residential, commercial and public LID case studies from across the state.
- Opportunities to network with government leaders, development professionals and stormwater managers about ways to overcome impediments to implementing Low Impact Development.

The N.C. Coastal Federation is the state's only non-profit organization focused exclusively on protecting and restoring the coast of North Carolina through education, advocacy and habitat restoration and preservation. The federation's headquarters are at 3609 N.C 24 in Ocean between Morehead City and Swansboro and the office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The federation also operates field offices in Wilmington and Manteo. For more information call 252.393.8185 or check our website at www.nccoast.org.

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