

Your Watershed

By the Russian River Watershed Association

County of Sonoma Water Conservation Project

The County of Sonoma is a leader in efforts to conserve water and improve water quality through landscaping and site design. The Regional Parks Department has completed several improvements to the landscapes at the County Administration Center between Steele Lane and Bicentennial Way in Santa Rosa.

The primary goals of this ongoing landscape project are to conserve water resources, improve water quality, provide community education, create positive examples of water conservation for Sonoma County residents, businesses, & agencies, and to improve the aesthetic image of the County Center.

Key techniques Regional Parks implements to conserve water include the use of drought tolerant plants and targeted irrigation. Planting water-conserving plants in place of turf is called xeriscaping. Elimination of turf allows Regional Parks to replace heavy water use irrigation spray heads with drip line systems that deliver water directly to the roots of each plant. The new gardens reduce irrigation by as much as 2.4 million gallons per year. Reduced overhead watering, reduces weed growth by 80%, which minimizes the need for harsh chemicals used in weed suppression.

The water conservation landscape project at the County Administration Center is divided into three phases. The project's first phase was the County Administration Building, completed in 2007. The design features the replacement of existing turf and shrubs with walking paths surrounded by attractive drought-resistant perennials and trees. An oak rain barrel collects runoff from a downspout and exhibits an easy and affordable way for residents to collect and store rain water. The pervious pavers and decomposed granite paths allow water to percolate into the soil and the vegetated and rock swales capture, slow, and filter runoff from rooftops and landscape areas, allowing ground water to recharge.

The second phase began in spring 2008, and includes the Human Services, the Permit and Resource Management Department (PRMD), and the ISD-Communications/Voter Registration buildings. The features of this phase also include turf and shrub replacement with native and drought resistant plants, drip line irrigation, a rain garden, and an erosion control device display.

Storm water controls are also planned for the PRMD building. The proposal includes retrofitting the south two-acre parking lot with various post-construction storm water devices. The devices will filter and improve storm water quality before discharging water into nearby Paulin Creek. A new underground detention basin will slow the large release of storm water typical from paved surfaces to mimic natural runoff conditions that existed prior to the construction of the parking lot. In addition, this project will

provide a place for the public to visit and learn about storm water treatment devices and storm water detention.

The third and final phase of the project is scheduled to begin in 2010 and includes the Fiscal, Sheriff's and the Hall of Justice buildings. Design is still in progress but the project will incorporate water conservation, storm water management, and education in a cohesive and aesthetically appealing way. The County has committed itself to better landscape management practices, through its use of storm water controls and water conservation.

Please visit our County Center and stroll around the grounds, observe, admire, and appreciate the beauty of the gardens and learn more about methods of conserving water. The beautiful vegetation is labeled for your convenience. Use our gardens and plant choices as an example of how you might incorporate these water conservation methods into your own landscapes.

Project sponsors include The County of Sonoma, The Sonoma County Water Agency, and the City of Santa Rosa.

This article was authored by Corbin Johnson et al., the Stormwater Coordinator for Sonoma County Regional Parks on behalf of RRWA. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.