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2014-12-04 / Front Page

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Project plans to prevent groundwater pollution

By KATHY CHANG

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MILLTOWN — Efforts are underway to reduce pollution in local waterways.

The Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program has conducted assessments for [East Brunswick](#), [Milltown](#), [New Brunswick](#), [North Brunswick](#) and [South Brunswick](#).

The project involved providing suggestions to intercept and treat water runoff with porous asphalt, rain gardens and other techniques before runoff goes into waterways such as the [Lawrence Brook](#), [Farrington Lake](#) and other bodies of water.



Chris Obropta, extension specialist in water resources for the Rutgers Cooperative Extension and an associate professor with the Department of Environmental Sciences at the School of Environmental & Biological Sciences at Rutgers University, presented the assessments Nov. 25 at the monthly meeting of the Lawrence Brook Watershed Partnership at the Milltown Senior Center.

Obropta said four reports on stormwater management have shown the pollution that goes into the water is due in some part to urbanization, geese and agriculture.

The largest source of the pollution problem is urbanization, which was found to exist in varying degrees in the five municipalities analyzed.

In [East Brunswick](#), 61.4 percent of the township is urbanized.

The [Lawrence Brook](#) stretches 10 miles in [East Brunswick](#), which has some 14,340 acres of pavement. Of that coverage, runoff from 640 acres is from impervious surfaces. Many other bodies of water also take runoff from [East Brunswick](#) surfaces.

In [Milltown](#), 88.1 percent of the borough is urbanized and 5.7 percent is made up of forest. All runoff drains into the [Lawrence Brook](#).

Of the 1,021 acres of pavement in the borough, some 407 acres is impervious surfaces.

Obropta said that if porous asphalt is replaced at the Milltown Public Library and trench drains and rain gardens are placed at [Parkview Elementary School](#) and [Joyce Kilmer Middle School](#), some 41 acres — or 13.8 millions of gallons of runoff water — can be treated before it enters the [Lawrence Brook](#).

"These numbers are huge," Obropta said.

In [South Brunswick](#), an analysis found that the township is a diverse community and is divided pretty evenly across the board between urbanization; forest areas; and small-, medium- and large-density units. Several bodies of water receive runoff, including [Lawrence Brook](#), [Heathcote Brook](#) and [Devils Brook](#).

In June, Obropta and a team of interns identified three to four projects in each town. The projects range from churches and schools to firehouses and Elk lodges.

"We were looking for large parking lots with grass," he said, adding that there are many more projects identified in the municipalities.

The projects that were chosen in [South Brunswick](#) included [St. Barnabas Episcopal Church](#) in [Monmouth Junction](#), [Grace Community Chapel](#) in [Monmouth Junction](#) and the [South Brunswick Public Library](#).

The assessments came out of water restoration plans from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) for phosphorous impairment, which included a last chapter of how to treat water. A TMDL is the maximum amount of a pollutant that a body of water can receive while still meeting surface water quality standards.

Obropta said those TMDL plans cost \$200,000-\$400,000 to conduct. After money ran dry, the Rutgers Cooperative Extension decided to take the last chapter and develop proposed projects that could be presented to municipalities.

Obropta said the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife granted \$175,000 for projects involving 54 towns. In [Middlesex County](#), projects are underway in [Perth Amboy](#) and [Woodbridge](#).

"The projects will be on a first-come, first-served basis," Obropta said, adding that the funding only goes only so far. "We want to stretch the \$175,000 as far as we can and get as many towns engaged."

The effort provides opportunities for schools, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, honor societies and other organizations to get involved.

Obropta said the ultimate goal is to work with business administrators, mayors, council members, green teams and communities as a whole to turn these proposed projects into a reality.

For more information, visit www.water.rutgers.edu or contact Obropta at obropta@envisci.rutgers.edu.

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