

EPA and Maine Take Action to Reduce Stormwater Pollution in South Portland Ecosystem

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Contact Information: David Deegan, (617) 918-1017

(Boston, Mass. - Dec. 5, 2008) – Federal and state environmental authorities are enacting strong measures to reduce pollution problems caused by stormwater runoff into a Portland-area stream suffering from the effects of stormwater flowing from large impervious surfaces including parking lots and large roofs.

Specifically, EPA and the Maine Dept. of Environmental Protection have announced a targeted effort to apply more stringent controls on polluted stormwater discharging into Long Creek, a freshwater stream that flows into Clark's Pond, the Fore River, and eventually Casco Bay. Long Creek – above Clark's Pond – drains a watershed area just under 3.5 square miles, located primarily in the City of South Portland and the City of Westbrook, with smaller portions in the Town of Scarborough and the City of Portland, Maine.

The new environmental protections will require properties with more than one acre of impervious area to apply for a Clean Water Act permit for stormwater discharges to Long Creek. The permits will require that these properties reduce pollution by allowing stormwater to percolate into soils, by conducting more frequent and thorough street sweeping, by being more careful in storing polluting materials, such as oils and paints, on their property, or by conducting other stormwater management and stream restoration activities. Many of the impervious surfaces causing polluted stormwater runoff are the result of relatively recent development.

"Polluted stormwater runoff causes serious water quality problems, because significant amounts of pollutants can be carried from roads, parking lots and roofs directly to rivers, streams and lakes," said Robert Varney, regional administrator of EPA's New England office. "By working closely with the Maine DEP, we will help restore ecological health to Long Creek. We also intend to allow facilities to have flexibility and time to meet the new standards."

Large parking lots and roads collect pollution every time a vehicle drives across them or parks on them. Pollutants include zinc from the wear of automobile tires, lead from diesel fuel combustion, copper from auto brake pad wear and oil from auto engines. Pollutants accumulate on these hard surfaces, and are washed off by rainfall that would otherwise percolate into the soil under natural conditions.

Maine Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner David Littell noted that, in addition to the state and federal focus on the problem, local officials and businesses have been working for some time to develop a plan to address it collaboratively.

According to Littell, "South Portland has been a municipal leader in successfully resolving environmental challenges. Continuing that leadership, South Portland's officials and business leaders have been working with state representatives and environmental groups on a plan to restore the health of this ecosystem which coexists next to our state's largest retail shopping area. The forward-thinking municipal and business leaders in South Portland, Portland, Westbrook and Scarborough have developed the Long Creek Restoration Plan to get this effort moving."

Since 2007, the development of the plan has included active participation by businesses, the other communities, the Maine Department of Transportation, the Maine Turnpike Authority and private landowners. The effort has been supported by Maine DEP and EPA.

EPA is exercising its "residual designation authority" under the federal Clean Water Act. This authority allows EPA to regulate previously uncontrolled sources of storm water pollution contributing to water quality problems. Stormwater runoff at sites with large paved areas, including shopping malls and parking areas, can deposit concentrated amounts of sediment, nutrients and toxic metals into surrounding waters. When rain falls in a natural environment it slowly soaks into the soil where it is filtered and then replenishes the underground water supply and local streams. When rain

falls on a parking lot, it runs off in great volume and at high velocities, washing out streambeds and disrupting the fragile balance of sensitive streams.

In 1998, DEP identified Long Creek area as an urban watershed suffering water quality degradation caused by rapid development, including malls and commercial sites. Since then, DEP has conducted numerous scientific studies of Long Creek to better understand the physical, biological and hydrological characteristics of the watershed.

This analysis indicates that Long Creek's is being harmed not only by the pollutants contained in stormwater from impervious areas, but also by the volume of stormwater these areas generate.

The Long Creek watershed has seen significant urbanization and commercial development in recent years, including the Maine Mall, Interstate highways and interchanges, industrial facilities, office parks and hotels. The expansion of impervious cover has caused an increase in volume and frequency of stormwater runoff, a decline in Long Creek water quality, and violations of Maine's water quality standards, which are measures of the health of surface waters.

"Stormwater has become a leading source of water pollution in New England," said Steve Hinchman, attorney for the Conservation Law Foundation, which petitioned EPA to require permits limiting polluted discharges into Long Creek. "Left unchecked, polluted stormwater could destroy the bays and beaches that are the jewels of the Maine Coast. We commend EPA, Maine DEP, and community and business leaders for addressing the problem and we are committed to working with them to restore Long Creek and areas downstream, including the Fore River and Casco Bay."

This action follows a similar EPA decision on Nov. 11 to require permits of stormwater discharges from large impervious surfaces in the upper Charles River watershed in Massachusetts, based on extensive studies showing that stormwater was fueling the growth of excess plant life, including toxic algae, in the Charles River.

More information: [Stormwater and permits in New England](http://epa.gov/region01/npdes/stormwater/index.html) (epa.gov/region01/npdes/stormwater/index.html)

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