

Oak Creek Watershed Council WIP Outreach

Public Meetings held on September 22nd and 23rd

Here is a list of the questions collected from the audience. These questions have been organized into several categories and have been addressed below in the order of most to least frequently asked:

1. Concerns about existing Waste Water Systems
2. Grant Funds available to upgrade existing Waste Water Systems
3. E. coli levels
4. Water Sampling
5. Pet Impacts and Management
6. Land Management: Agriculture and Wildlife
7. City and Regional Planning
8. Tourism and Recreation
9. Sedimentation
10. Invasive Species Presentation by FVRG

1. Concerns about Waste Water (WW) Systems

Q. What solutions are there for private properties with septic problems? Would they be condemned or would they be grandfathered in?

A. In Arizona, all WW treatment systems in operation prior to January 1, 2001 are classified as General Permit 1.09 systems (grandfathered systems) and therefore have state rules governing their operation and maintenance. These rules allow the system owner to operate, repair and maintain their system within the specified limits described in rule. Please review these specific rule limits in the Arizona Administrative Code or contact us with specific questions about our site. In summary, the rule allows you to install a new leach trench, tank, or pipe if you follow the rule. You should call your county health department for assistance with interpretations of the rule and to see if they require a permit for your repair or upgrade.

Q. Will a watershed council member come to a homeowner's property and review possible problem areas a homeowner might want to address?

A. Yes, OCWC staff members and volunteers can help you or refer you to the proper professional. Please call 928.554.5460 or email morgan@oakcreekwatershed.org to set up an appointment with an OCWC staff member.

Q. I have a very old waste water system adjacent to the creek. Is it possible to find out if we are hurting the water quality of Oak Creek?

A. Yes, as noted in the previous question, we encourage property owners to set up an appointment to have an OCWC staff member or other waste water professional to perform a site visit.

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Q. Is aerobic system performance adequate?

A. When properly designed, operated and maintained, aerobic systems can provide a high quality wastewater treatment alternative to septic systems. Each site has design constraints (aka limiting site conditions) that influence the type of treatment and disposal system best suited for the site. A proper site and soil evaluation can help you select the best and most economical waste system for your property.

Q. Could you please add information about tracer dye to the website? How is it used to diagnose a system's impact on the creek? What is the cost and where can it be purchased?

A. Information about tracer dyes will be added to our website in the future. Please contact us if you want to be on the mailing list to receive info on Tracer Dyes. Tracer dyes are an effective way for homeowners to evaluate if their system is leaking into Oak Creek. However, it requires placing the tracer dye in the outlet from the septic tank so the volume of effluent in the tank does not dilute the dye. If you need help with using tracer dyes, please contact OCWC staff for assistance.

Q. How far back from the creek should a septic system be?

A. Current rule requires a standard gravity septic system to be located a minimum of 100 feet from the FEMA 10 year flood elevation. However, the rule allows for much closer separations for treatment technologies that create higher levels of treatment. Using pressure distribution, advanced treatment, and subsurface drip irrigation, waste system designs will accommodate any property in the Oak Creek Watershed.

2. Grant Funds available to Upgrade existing Waste Water Systems

Q. How do you qualify for project funds to improve a waste water system?

A. You must first provide us with your name, address and system upgrade requirements to be considered for future grant funding. During 2012 and 2013, the OCWC will be writing grants to fund implementation of the Best Management Practices contained in the WIP report. These include evaluating and prioritizing the systems that need to be upgraded and to provide funding as needed and as funds are available. Please contact us and we will visit your site to evaluate your waste system upgrade requirements.

Q. With the grants available for septic upgrade, can you estimate if they would provide 50% of the costs and can you give a dollar amount for the total cost?

A. In our previous grant (from over 10 years ago), system cost averaged \$18,000 dollars with 50% paid for by the homeowner and 50% provided by the grant. The allocation and amount of future grant resources to assist with septic system upgrades has not been determined at this time. We are currently collecting information to help better determine the best way to provide assistance to all property owners who are interested in septic upgrades. Anyone can submit a grant

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application to ADEQ. OCWC will submit a grant application to ADEQ to partially fund upgrades to onsite waste systems in 2013.

Q. Can you estimate how many properties will be awarded funds to upgrade their wastewater systems?

A. Funding levels are unpredictable and so it is difficult to provide a detailed answer at this time. Please see the answer to the previous question for additional information. Based on our discussions with ADEQ grant staff, we anticipate being able to provide some type of grant funded assistance in the future.

Q. Will there be any grants for commercial installations?

A. Both residential and commercial systems will be eligible to apply for grant funds to improve waste water systems. OCWC will submit a grant application to ADEQ to partially fund residential and commercial waste systems in 2013.

3. E. Coli

Q. Can we live with E. coli symptoms at current levels?

A. Current levels of E. coli might result in infections for children and the elderly. When surface waters contain fecal contaminants, people can come in contact with pathogens such as Cryptosporidium, Giardia, Shigella, norovirus, and other pathogenic organisms when recreating in the stream.

Q. Why aren't there any signs warning about E. coli?

A. There is no doubt more can be done to better inform the public of the presence and associated dangers of E. coli in Oak Creek. The current warning systems (to alert the public to possible E. coli endangerment) are the current conditions hotline for Slide Rock State Park and the USFS visitor centers. The Arizona State Parks Board operates a surface water quality microbiology laboratory at Slide Rock State Park. Current conditions at Slide Rock State Park are available by calling (602) 542-0202.

Q. Does E. coli die as it goes downstream?

A. Current scientific research estimates E coli has a life cycle of 90 to 120 days. E coli appears to settle out in the sediments found at the bottom of the stream bed. People in the creek and storm water can move the E coli into the water column where it can migrate downstream.

Q. Is E coli in Oak Creek a danger to well water?

A. In the upper reaches, the surface waters of Oak Creek travel across impervious layers of sandstone where there is less chance of contamination of ground water and wells. In the lower reaches of Oak Creek, during flooding conditions, surface water may infiltrate the shallow perched aquifers that contain many drinking water wells.

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4. Water Sampling

Q. Is there a map of test sites? How were those sites chosen?

A. A map of water sampling test sites can be found in the Watershed Improvement Plan (WIP), which will be distributed to meeting attendees but is also available online for download to the public. Test sites were selected by monitoring team leaders in consultation with the OCWIC, a technical advisory group with extensive knowledge of current and historical watershed conditions.

Q. When are samples taken (time and day)? Why?

A. Initially samples were collected for baseline water quality evaluations. Storm water sampling was usually performed in response to conditions in the creek. The days storm water samples were collected required rapid response to catch the washes when storm water was running. Samples collected during periods without rain establish a “baseline” for conditions without storm interference. Focus sites were also identified and sampled to analyze specific potential pollution sources.

Q. What else needs to be tested for besides E. coli and how would that testing occur. For example, should testing for endocrine disruptors? How much money would be needed to fund the “ultimate” testing program?

A. An ideal testing program would indeed test for emerging contaminants such as endocrine disrupting compounds (EDC); if funding sources approved of these more elaborate and expensive tests. However, Oak Creek’s primary “Outstanding Waters” designation is “full body contact” and so more expensive tests for EDC would probably not get funded when the less expensive E. coli test (as an indicator of fecal contamination) is available. The E. coli single sample maximum is 235 for “full body contact” in Arizona recreational waters.

5. Pet Impacts Management

Q. Is there any benefit in having and enforcing leash laws?

A. While leash laws have their place, the key lever for improving E. coli levels is homeowner cleanup of their dog’s feces.

Q. Is there a program to educate Sedona regarding dog waste and its connection to E. coli?

A. The Oak Creek Watershed Council is implementing several initiatives to educate Sedona residents about dog waste’s impact on E. coli.

6. Land Management: Agriculture and Wildlife

Q. What is the impact of flood irrigating and fertilizing to the creek?

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A. Flood irrigation that does not result in tail water or overflow into Oak Creek has little effect on the water quality in Oak Creek. If flood irrigation does overflow to Oak Creek it may carry fecal matter, fertilizers, invasive weed seeds, and other contaminants to water quality.

Q. How long does it take horse feces to become harmless?

A. To be answered at a later time

Q. Will horse and cow manure on an irrigated field compost into harmless fertilizer for the field?

A. To be answered at a later time

Q. We have a slough that is monitored by Nature Conservancy. Do they check for E. Coli?

A. To be answered at a later time

Q. How does water from Oak Creek used for irrigation effect the property irrigated and the animals that graze that property?

A. To be answered at a later time

Q. Has anything been done to control raccoons and skunks? They thrive on bait discarded by fisherman. These baits are not natural to our area. These animals along with javelinas are polluters.

A. Discarded fishing bait is one of many sources of food for wildlife living near the creek. Generally speaking, proper trash disposal and containment is essential to reducing the impact of wildlife on water quality in Oak Creek.

Q. How can I improve my property to reduce or eliminate E. coli introduced to Oak Creek? My septic was installed 25 years ago and my property is irrigated.

A. As previously noted, we encourage property owners to set up an appointment to have an OCWC staff member, volunteer professional, or certified waste system inspector perform a site visit. A trained professional will be able to assess the functionality of the existing WW treatment system and also provide guidance for improving the system (if needed). As previously discussed, irrigated land should prevent overflow to Oak Creek during irrigation to prevent transport of pollutants to Oak Creek.

7. City and Regional Planning

Q. How much impact has the Sedona waste system made?

A. To be answered at a later time

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Q. Can the WIP promote a plan for the City of Sedona to install/provide sewage lines to homeowners?

A. To be answered at a later time

Q. Should Yavapai County be looking at a system for Cornville and surrounding areas?

A. To be answered at a later time

8. Tourism and Recreation

Q. Why not limit the numbers of people in Upper Oak Creek per day?

A. Since there is a correlation between recreational density and E. coli levels, this is a solution that has been previously suggested. Slide Rock State Park limits the number of visitors to the park. Given the complexity of stakeholders and regulatory agencies involved in this area, it is unlikely that this option would be feasible for all of upper reaches of Oak Creek. There may be other ways to achieve reductions in pollution without restricting access.

9. Sedimentation

Q. Will the remediation effort address the high sediment loads from the upper creek area that build up in the lower area?

A. The WIP report has a Best Management Practice (BMP) to address sediment source reduction within Oak Creek Canyon and at Slide Rock State Park. This BMP seeks to reduce the amount of erosion and sediment entering Oak Creek as a result of soil disturbance from people creating new social trails. The state and county road maintenance departments are working on improving their maintenance techniques to reduce sediment movement due to maintenance.

10. Invasive Species Presentation by FVRG

Q. How can I get rid of the bamboo-like reeds that are spreading along Oak Creek in our area?

A. All invasive species questions should be directed to Laura Jones, she can be contacted at:

Laura F. Jones
Verde Watershed Restoration Coalition
Phone: (928) 301-4934
Email: laura@verdewrc.org
Mailing address: 821 N Main Street
Cottonwood, AZ 86326

Q. How can we get everyone notified about the invasive Tree of Paradise?

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A. All invasive species questions should be directed to Laura Jones, her contact information is listed in the answer to the previous question.