

Headwater Streets: Bringing the Benefits of Small Streams and Wetlands to a Neighborhood near You!

Every river begins somewhere – its headwaters. Even the largest of rivers starts as a network of small headwater streams, many of which are small enough to cross with a single step, or don't even have flowing water year-round. And while we often marvel at the power and beauty of rivers, their headwaters seem to invoke little but disrespect – if they are noticed at all – as they are ditched, moved, placed in culverts or simply filled. Natural headwater streams and wetlands provide many important functions. They protect water quality, maintain natural flood control, trap sediment, and provide important habitat. However, these functions are largely or entirely lost when a river's headwater stream network is converted to urban and suburban land use. In our residential communities, rooftops, downspouts and roadside ditches have replaced small streams and wetlands as the headwaters of our local stream systems.

Gutters and downspouts may effectively transport rainwater from rooftops to roadside ditches and storm sewers. However, this rooftop-to-downspout-to-ditch system doesn't provide any beneficial headwater functions. The driveway-to-curb-to-storm sewer system is equally ineffective at protecting water quality, controlling downstream flooding and providing habitat.

How can we restore beneficial headwater functions in our own neighborhoods? By taking any of the following actions, each and every homeowner can mimic the functions of natural headwater systems in their own back yards:



- Spread rainwater across the lawn instead of sending it directly to the storm sewer by **Disconnecting Downspouts**.
- **Plant a Rain Garden** to capture and infiltrate storm water runoff.
- **Landscape with native plants**, especially around water and drainage features such as ponds, wetlands, roadside ditches and backyard streams.
- Harvest rainwater and store it on site to water a garden or lawn by **Installing Rain Barrels or Cisterns**.
- **Establish a No-Mow Zone** around backyard streams and wetlands.
- Don't over-fertilize your lawn – **get your soil tested**.
- **Reduce the amount of impervious surface wherever possible**. Consider mulch, gravel and other alternatives for walkways.

Contact Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District for more information. www.cuyahogawcd.org

Together, we can turn your street into a Headwater Street!

