

City Talk Column for May 24, 2023

Public Works Department

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Are you ready for monsoons?

We hope that you've all had a chance to enjoy Oak Creek as it meanders through the magnificent red rocks of Sedona. Everyone, from residents to visitors, shares the responsibility to protect and preserve these wonderful treasures. Weather patterns have been changing, and much of northern Arizona saw twice the rainfall from a typical monsoon last year. Are you ready for the upcoming monsoon?

For nearly the last three decades, Sedona, and much of the southwest, has been in a deep drought. While there are still persistent drought effects, such as the low water levels of lakes in the Colorado basin, locally, there have been effects from the more frequent rain events and amounts of precipitation. Typical with weather changes, there is good news and bad news. Property owners have been accustomed to minimal maintenance requirements for property with regards to drainage and stormwater runoff. Due to the increased frequency of storms and rainfall amounts, this passive maintenance practice needs to be reconsidered. The city is reminding property owners of their responsibility to maintain drainages, arroyos and washes passing through their property.

While there are a few drainages that are maintained by the city, mostly drainages that flow through city property, an overwhelming majority of drainages that pass through private property are the responsibility of the property owner to maintain. In the Sedona City Code, it states that owners must keep and maintain drainages free of trash, debris, excessive vegetation and other obstacles that would pollute, contaminate or significantly slow the flow of water. The code addresses both stormwater quality (trash, waste, debris) and quantity (debris and other potential water flow blockages) concerns.

Within the last couple of months, Sedona received an extraordinary amount of rain and snow precipitation. Warmer temperatures during the snow event resulted in heavy, wet snow, causing damage to many trees and other vegetation throughout the Sedona area. The damage ranged from broken branches to entire trees falling under the weight of the snow. Many of these damaged trees and vegetation fell into or in the immediate vicinity of drainages. These broken branches, downed and damaged trees and vegetation can both prevent or significantly slow stormwater flow through a drainage, wash or arroyo, or migrate downstream during a rain event and create a blockage at stormwater infrastructure, such as a culvert under a road or a bridge crossing the drainage. Stormwater, unable to pass through the drainage or stormwater infrastructure unimpeded, will back up and pond at the blockage. This ponding will continue until the point in which a new path downstream is found by the water. This new path may be into and through another property, over the top of the road or even through a nearby home.

This underscores the importance of property owners maintaining all drainages, washes and arroyos to prevent flooding events on their own property and their neighbor's property downstream. And because all of our drainages eventually flow to Oak Creek, preventing trash and other waste from entering drainages and making sure they have unimpeded flow is also vital for the enjoyment of Oak Creek by all. Thank you for your assistance in keeping your drainages clear. The city, your neighbors and Oak Creek thank you! For additional information, please visit the Public Works Department webpage at www.sedonaaz.gov/publicworks.