

City Talk Column for May 22, 2024
Community Development Department
Michael Righi, CFM, Assistant Engineer

Do you love the unmatched scenic beauty of Oak Creek, enjoy the cool water, or love the incredible trails around our quaint city? Oak Creek, designated an Outstanding Arizona Water (OAW) by Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ), is unfortunately impaired due to E. coli. The creek is also sensitive to other pollution resulting from both work and play. Whether you are a resident, business owner or employee, or a visitor, we, including the city, share in the stewardship of Oak Creek. How can you help?

Residents – Residing in Sedona and maintaining property comes with responsible decisions that can ultimately impact the creek which include the following:

- Minimize use of pesticides and herbicides - use these sparingly, and, if possible, utilize organic and/or low-impact alternatives. If utilized, spray only what is required to treat an area or a specific weed; excess product, in the presence of rain, can be conveyed by stormwater to the creek.
- Maintain drainages and control stormwater runoff - Oak Creek is fed by local washes and arroyos and becomes turbid during rain events (turbidity is the murky red tint of red erosion products in water). This turbidity lowers water quality and is addressed by: placing rock within landscape drainages and swales, adding settling pools along swales, using gutters on homes and structures, utilizing rock splash pads at downspout outlets and under scuppers, and addressing erosion when discovered.
- Pick up after pets – Feces of mammals, including dogs, contains E. coli bacteria. When waste is not picked up, the bacteria can make its way to the creek during rain events. To help with this issue, the city has installed and maintains many pet waste stations throughout the city. The US Forest Service and some private homeowner's associations also own and maintain waste stations.

Business owners and employees - Keeping shop and working in Sedona also requires decisions that can impact the creek, including the following:

- Proper trash and waste management - keep trash and litter under control by keeping dumpsters closed when not in use; trash and litter can escape the dumpster by wildlife scavenging and wind. Overly full dumpsters may also have trash and litter escape when serviced. Ultimately, trash and litter may reach the creek by transport via stormwater runoff from rain events.
- Proper disposal of cleaning liquids - businesses should utilize their deep sink for disposal of mop water and cleaning liquids, not the parking lot or other site outside of the business. Waste products in the liquid, as well as cleaning agents (such as ammonia and bleach), are picked up in the next rain event and ushered to the creek.
- Responsible cleaning practices - do not clean/rinse off slip-resistant mats outside in the parking lot or outside of the business. The grease, food debris, cleaning agents (if used), and other pollutants may make their way to the creek via runoff of stormwater.

Visitors to Oak Creek and Sedona – Locals and visitors both enjoy the trails, shopping, and fine dining amongst the vibrant red rocks, glimmering waters of Oak Creek, and magnificent scenery. Decisions that you may make that can directly impact Oak Creek include the following:

- Pick up the poo - as mentioned, pets are wonderful companions that we share experiences with. Whether on the trail, shopping, or at the resort/room, clean up after they go. Utilize pet waste stations if available. If not available, a plastic bag from a grocery store or a Ziploc bag may be used until waste is able to be properly disposed.
- Responsible recreation - whether hiking, riding a bike, or four wheeling in a Jeep, side by side, or OHV, stay on the designated trail/road. Venturing off the designated trail can result in damage to sensitive areas, which

include plants, animals, and even microbes that are easily harmed by encroachments. Additionally, the disturbed soil can increase turbidity in stormwater and Oak Creek due to increased erosion during storm events.

- Leave No Trace - practice 'Leave No Trace' ethics, preserve the area as you found it. Properly dispose of all trash, including food scraps, food containers, and food wrappers; left in the vicinity of the creek these attract animals which then defecate near the creek, increasing E. coli levels. One good practice is to pack out more than you pack in, picking up any litter and trash in the area, leaving the area better than you found it.

City of Sedona – The city and its employees perform numerous tasks to help in the preservation of Oak Creek. The following are a few activities undertaken by the government to improve Oak Creek:

- Operate and maintain drainages, ditches, and other stormwater conveyances within public property and right of way – these all constitute the state permitted municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4). This is a state permit obtained by the city to operate and requires annual reporting. The city regularly has no significant comments on annual submissions; this past March, the city was audited by ADEQ and received only minor comments and corrections.
- Reviewing and inspecting development - this includes residential, commercial, and capital improvements; the city reviews submitted plans to make certain stormwater requirements are met, and, during construction, perform inspections to verify management practices to keep stormwater clean are in place and maintained.
- Maintain city infrastructure and pet waste stations - the city utilizes low impact tools, such as organic herbicides, to maintain parks, sidewalks and shared-use paths, and road medians. The city maintains existing pet waste stations and adds new upon completion of many projects, such as shared use paths, throughout the city. There are currently twenty-three pet waste stations maintained by the city and just under one ton of pet feces (1994.6 pounds) has been collected through the first four months of this year. Last year 5,217.3 pounds of pet waste was collected.

Together, residents, businesses, visitors, and city government have a responsibility to protect and preserve Oak Creek for all to enjoy; please share in this duty to protect and preserve the creek where you can.