



## Wetland to help clean up urban creek

By Jeff DeLong • [jdelong@rgj.com](mailto:jdelong@rgj.com) • June 5, 2010

Some of nature's tiniest critters should soon be helping to clean one of Reno's most polluted creeks.

Workers Friday began planting wetland plants -- rushes, sedges and cattails -- to establish an experimental wetlands at Chalk Creek in northwest Reno.

The idea is to create an environment ideal for bacteria that will gobble up sulfates, the creek's primary pollutant.

"It should provide them an optimal environment to do their business," said Keith White, who is working toward his master's degree in environmental engineering at University of Nevada, Reno with the wetlands project.

Chalk Creek, a tributary of the Truckee River, contains dense concentrations of salts and nutrients capable of fueling algae blooms.

It's "urban slobber," consisting of pollutants flowing into the creek from northwest Reno's densely developed neighborhoods. Everyday practices such as fertilizer use, over watering lawns and washing cars in driveways are responsible, experts said.

The wetlands project is seen as one way to help clean up the creek. Funded with \$163,000 from the Truckee Meadows Water Authority's Truckee River Fund, the wetlands is being established where the creek flows past Rainbow Ridge Park.

"We stand a pretty good chance of reducing (pollutants) substantially," said Lynell Garfield, a hydrologist with the city of Reno.

After planting is done and other final changes made, Chalk Creek's waters will be directed to flow through the 45-foot-wide, 100-foot-long wetlands.

Water will take four to six days to trickle through the low-oxygen environment, believed to be plenty of time for bacteria to remove targeted sulfates, said Molly Reeves, a scientist with JBR Environmental Consultants, Inc., hired by the city for the project.

If the pilot project succeeds as hoped, larger wetlands or additional small ones could be established in other parts of the Chalk Creek watershed, Reeves said.

Exercising near the project area Friday, nearby resident Julie Riley said the idea sounds good to her.

"It's wonderful if they can improve it," she said of the creek. "The cleaner the better."

But the wetlands are only part of a larger effort to clean up Chalk Creek. Also important is changing behavior of the residents of northwest Reno who now pollute the creek with their urban slobber.

"It's sort of a little-by-little approach," Garfield said.

Garfield has made presentations regarding the situation to local middle school students, something she said could ultimately make a big difference.

"They're taking the message home and telling their parents," Garfield said. "I think that's one of the best things we can do -- work with the kids."

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Volunteers plant native plants including cattails, foreground, in a wetland project in the active channel of Chalk Creek north of McCarran Boulevard between McCarran Boulevard and Robb Drive Friday June 4, 2010. From left are Scott Billingsley, Andy Sieracki, Michael Yoelin, Mitchell Mauk and Don Dawson. The purpose of the project is to help protect the quality of the creek water that drains into the Truckee River from urban developments. Marilyn Newton/RGJ (RGJ)

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