

Park restoration begins to take shape

Cove Spring project will revitalize 3,500 linear feet of stream



By Nick Ozburn and Andrew Cammack/Special to The State Journal
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Learn more about a new project to restore the stream and wetlands around the historic Cove Spring Park and Nature Preserve at an informational meeting at 2 p.m. Sunday. Project team leaders will answer questions from the public at the picnic shelter next to the park's parking lot.

Cove Spring Park is located off U.S. 127 just north of the city.

The project, a collaboration between the City of Frankfort and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, will reduce erosion while creating habitat for animals, fish and wetland species.

The restoration project is being funded through the Kentucky Wetland and Stream Mitigation Program at no cost to Frankfort residents. Work will include more than a mile of stream restoration within the park as well as several acres of wetland restoration.

Construction equipment will be used to lower stream banks and place rock in various places to create areas of pools and riffles. During construction, some bottomland areas at the park will be temporarily inaccessible to the public because of excavation and clearing work. The Upland Trail, Holly Loop and the Osage Trail will remain open to hiking. The Sky Trail and archery range will be unaffected by the construction.

Once construction is completed this year, workers will plant native vegetation in affected areas. The project will be completed in the spring of 2013 and will be monitored and maintained for five years under terms of the project.

Why this project?

Cove Spring Park includes remnants of a dam that once fed the city's water supply. Although the city abandoned the cove as its water source more than a century ago, sediment continued to accumulate behind the dam until it was breached in the 1980s.

A new channel was cut through the accumulated sediment along the side of the valley. This created an unstable stream with tall banks and poor habitat. Today, the stream is disconnected from its floodplain. Without connection to its floodplain, seasonal floodwaters flow violently through the channel, destroying its banks and streambed habitat.

Urbanization of the watershed is creating additional problems for the stream. Much of the area that drains into Cove Spring Park is paved. The paved areas shed rainwater very quickly into the stream system, increasing the magnitude of floods.

Changing the stream and floodplain will allow the area to better accommodate floods, stabilize valley bottom sediment and provide better access to a floodplain. Lowering the stream's banks will allow seasonal floodwaters to spread out and slow down, reducing erosion of the stream channel. Rock structures will further protect stream banks while creating riffles and pools.

On the west side of U.S. 127, the stream was straightened long ago, presumably for farming. The existing stream has erosion problems; it is cutting downward, lowering the water table and reducing the surrounding wetland. It now provides poor habitat for aquatic species.

This area has potential as excellent wetland habitat. Reconstruction will improve the wetlands by restructuring the stream and creating a series of riffles and pools. The project will include planting a variety of native wetland plants while limiting nonnative weed species. The wetland can then provide better habitat for fish, amphibians, waterfowl, dragonflies and numerous other animals.

The restoration has been planned with long-term goals in mind. Although project areas will look raw in the beginning, it will continue to improve as vegetation grows and the park matures.

Project partners also include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Kentucky Division of Water, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USEPA, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, HG Mays Corporation, Biohabitats, Ecotech Consultants, Ridgewater and Ecogro.

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