

Protect Our Waterways from Curb to Creek
Conservation Corner – September 2015

Have you ever wondered where rainwater goes once it travels down your driveway and into the street? Did you know that Ashland rain water flows into one of 4,146 storm drains? Some people assume that storm drain water first goes to the waste water treatment plant at the end of Oak Street to be “cleansed” of any contaminants. Unfortunately, this is incorrect. Once water enters a storm drain it goes directly into one of our creeks. All these creeks connect to Bear Creek, which then meets the Rogue River and eventually exits into the Pacific Ocean on the Oregon coast. This means that any cigarette butts, organic debris, dog poop, or other pollutants are, sadly, floating along the river route, impacting water quality for fish, plants and other living beings.

Have you ever noticed the blue and silver medallions placed on curbs close to storm drains in town which say, “NO DUMPING * DRAINS TO STREAM”? These serve as reminders and to get the attention of people who may not realize that the distance between your yard & the water’s edge is as close as the nearest storm drain or ditch. You might be surprised how many of these you will notice now.

Ashland offers several opportunities seasonally and year round to help citizens to make excellent choices for protecting our waterways. The Ashland Street Department works hard to keep the City’s storm drain system clean and flowing freely, in part by operating street sweepers. One goal of the street sweeping program is to prevent flooding (during rain events) and the second is to ensure the storm drain water is as clean as possible when it flows into our local creeks and streams.

The fall season keeps the street sweepers especially busy with falling leaves. Because the leaves picked up from the street also contain residues from vehicles and other potential contaminants, the City is required to landfill this material. This means that whatever the street sweeper collects ends up in the landfill. This includes organic material mixed with trash. Sending organic material, such as leaves, to the landfill is literally throwing away valuable resources.

You can help by keeping leaves from entering the storm drains which keeps them from getting clogged and keeps valuable compostable leaves out of the landfill. What grows in your yard can be composted and it can become a beneficial product (organic soil). You can turn those leaves into a beneficial product by either home composting or opting for curbside green debris service to collect garden and yard material. As an added bonus, keeping leaves and other debris out of the storm drain reduces operating costs for the City, which saves all of us money.

Since composting at home is not an option for everyone, here are several programs available to help residents and businesses keep leaves out of the streets, including:

- Green debris curbside collection
- Free leaf drop events at the recycle center. There will be two free leaf drop Sundays at the recycle center on Water Street, on November 15th and December 13th.
- Pre-paid leaf bag program. For those unable to transport leaves there is a pre-paid leaf bag program with a limited discount from October 26 until November 6. This program is offered November and December only.

The year-round green debris service allows citizens to divert leaves, yard and garden material into a 95-gallon cart which is picked up twice monthly. You can modify the service for not

shorter than a month at a time. You can also drive this material out to the transfer station for a fee.

Most of our yards generate organic material that would be best served composted. If each of us can do our share to care for our curbs by keeping street debris swept up year round and ensuring that only rain goes down the storm drain, then our waterways could be protected downstream.

More info is available on these programs are available at www.RecologyAshland.com or by emailing rbuck@recology.com.

Risa Buck serves on the Ashland Conservation Commission and is the Waste Zero Specialist for Recology Ashland.