Case Study

Walkable Washington

The Walkable Washington program grew out of the Feet First Cities Program. It showcases exceptional pedestrian-oriented improvements, community groups and outreach programs; maintains a statewide network for key contacts and stakeholders including an annual symposium; and provides assistance with Safe Routes to School, walking audits and other educational activities and programs.

Stormwater Management Pond and Trail
Arlington, WA

Description and purpose
The 9-acre Arlington Wetland was created to clean pollutants from urban run-off from the 280-acres of Old town Arlington, before it runs into the Stillaguamish River, which is Puget Sound’s fifth largest tributary. In addition to natural wildlife habitat, the project created a trail system for the area’s residents.

To encourage light human activity, one and a half miles of trails wind around and through the center of the wetland and connect to the Eagle Trail. Amenities in the area include four educational kiosks, picnic tables and benches, an off-leash area for dogs, three pet waste stations, and an osprey platform. An annual bird walk is held in conjunction with the Eagle Festival in February.
Costs and funding
The total cost of the project was $1.2 million. The Department of Ecology provided two grants totaling $800,000, and the remaining funds came from the City of Arlington’s stormwater utility fee.

Implementation time-frame
In the mid-1990’s, community concerns were presented to City Council about untreated urban runoff from streets spilling into the Stillaguamish River, resulting in poor water quality downstream. In 2000, the City of Arlington purchased the wetland property, originally a pasture and site of an old sawmill, and in 2005 a feasibility analysis was completed. Two grants were given by the Washington State Department of Ecology to design and construct the wetland, and construction of the wetland was completed 2011.

Community involvement
In the planning stage, the City talked to neighbors and land-owners of the surrounding area who were concerned about urban runoff and the impact of the wetland on their land. The design of the wetland was altered and ground-monitoring wells were installed to monitor urban runoff into the groundwater and floodplain. The city also had to work with farmers in the area to resolve their concern about losing more farmland and salmon to urbanization and possibly receiving runoff and pollution from urban stormwater. However, the city ensured that modeling of the issue did not present any problems and the benefits of the wetland were greater than the loss of farmland.

Benefits and results
The wetland now acts as a buffer between the farm and city, and stormwater runoff is checked by monitoring the water entering and exiting the wetland. Improved water quality in the river impacts juvenile Chinook and other salmonids downstream, a benefit for both fishermen and marine life.

A unique consideration of this wetland is the provision of recreational trails for people to escape from the urban hardscape, while reserving habitat for birds, amphibians, aquatic insects, and mammals. Through the trail access and the manmade wetland, visitors are able to enjoy the benefits of a water feature and its multiple ecosystem services at minimal cost. The Arlington Wetland is used by 30 to 60 people per day. Activities include bird watching, dog walking, jogging/hiking, social gatherings, and cross-country skiing. There is also a full-time, on-site caretaker who keeps the pet waste bag dispenser stocked, empties garbage cans, picks up litter, assures daytime use only on the site, and notifies the City when assistance is needed with any issues.

Since its inception, users of the Arlington Wetland have reported seeing much more wildlife in the area. By using an established field data collection sheet, interns and citizen scientists help monitor wildlife and vegetation, and the biological health of the aquatic system.

Project Contacts
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Resources
Wetland Brochure
Wetland Website
Trailguide, available upon request