

Rain Gardens Planned To Help Lake Wingra

City Will Create Eight Or Nine Of Them To Keep Dirt Out Of The Lake.

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The state Department of Natural Resources is giving Madison \$44,000 to improve Lake Wingra's water quality by planting flowers.

The city of Madison is planning to create eight or nine rain gardens along Adams Street between Edgewood Avenue and Harrison Street on the near West Side.

"It's a very cutting-edge project," said Melanie Conklin, spokeswoman for Mayor Dave Cieslewicz. "The whole point being keeping dirt out of our lakes."

The Adams Street gardens will be a pilot project to see if large-scale rain gardens can improve water quality, said Greg Fries, a city engineer.

The gardens will be placed in the street's terrace between the curb and sidewalk when the street is reconstructed in 2005.

Rain gardens use native plants to help absorb and filter runoff so that the dirty water doesn't run directly into the storm sewer and into the lake.

"The dirt around here has a lot of phosphorous in it," said Sue Ellingson, a member of Friends of Lake Wingra. "Phosphorous is a fertilizer. So even if just plain dirt goes into the lake, it causes problems with algae."

The Friends of Lake Wingra group approached the city this spring with the grant proposal, Ellingson said.

The city received the approval from the DNR Friday, Conklin said.

This would be the first street rain garden in Madison but the concept has been tried in Seattle, Ellingson said.

Fries said the city would use the grant money to hire an expert and buy needed plants.

Because the street is already set for reconstruction, it should be easy to reconfigure the storm sewer system to allow for drains beneath the gardens in case they become inundated, he said.

It hasn't been decided who will maintain the gardens. For the first couple of years, the gardens need to be regularly weeded but after that they are low maintenance, Fries said.

The city and Friends of Lake Wingra plan to hold neighborhood meetings to work out the maintenance issue.

If the gardens work, the city might be able to add rain gardens in other areas, Fries said.

"It's my own private hope that this will become standard practice," Ellingson said.

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