

The green infrastructure opportunity

Irrigation and landscape pros can brighten their futures by acting as resources to water quality managers. *By* MARISA PALMIERI



Rain gardens, like this one at the Brooklyn (N.Y.) Botanic Garden, are considered an element of green infrastructure.

The green infrastructure movement is growing in communities throughout the U.S. as a way to manage stormwater in urban environments while having a positive impact on the ecosystem.

To be more specific about what green infrastructure is, the Irrigation Association's (IA) John Farner turned to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) definition during a webinar in January, titled "Green Infrastructure: The Role of Stormwater Management." That is: "Green infrastructure uses vegetation, soils and natural processes to manage water and create healthier urban environments."

Why is this an important topic for irrigation and landscape professionals, Farner asked rhetorically? His answer was multipronged, but rested in co-presenter Paul Lander's succinct response.

"The opportunity here is to be a resource for water quality managers and sustainability professionals," said Lander, Ph.d, ASLA, LEED AP, a consultant with Dakota Ridge Partners in Boulder, Colo. "In almost every city across the nation, they're going to have a whole suite of things on their plates. If there's an opportunity for (irrigation professionals) to be seen as a resource, the profession's going to go a lot further, and we'll get more resources coming our way to help with this green infrastructure movement."



Paul Lander

MORE ON GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

At the scale of a city or county, green infrastructure refers to the patchwork of natural areas that provide habitat, flood protection, cleaner air and cleaner water for the community, Farner said. At the scale of a neighborhood or site, green infrastructure refers to stormwater management systems that mimic nature by soaking up and storing water.

Many states and municipalities (Philadelphia and Nashville, Tenn., to name a few) are exploring and adopting more holistic approaches to watershed management and stormwater control, including nontraditional green infrastructure approaches, such as vegetated swales, rain gardens, porous concrete and rain barrel installations. In addition to stormwater management benefits, officials are hoping to reap other green infrastructure perks like the enhanced livability and improved air quality that come from adding trees and vegetation to the urban environment, thus reducing urban temperatures and carbon dioxide in the ecosystem, Farner said.

WHAT ABOUT DROUGHT?

Drought is no doubt a primary concern in many pockets of the country, Farner said.

"You have to think about how drought affects green infrastructure," he said. "If a municipality is using plant material to

promote green infrastructure, that plant material needs to be living. If it's dead, that can have the same effect as concrete.”

So the question becomes, can the plant material officials are investing in for their green infrastructure projects sustain itself, especially under the threat of drought? That's not likely the case in all regions. If members of the irrigation industry have a seat at the table in green infrastructure discussions, there's a better chance irrigation will be considered a solution, Farner and Lander said.

SERVING AS A RESOURCE

Unfortunately, landscape overwatering is commonplace, Lander said. And it's the bane of water quality managers—officials at the local, state and federal levels whose jobs are to ensure compliance with regula-

tions to minimize ill effects on water sources.

In some areas of the country, violating storm-water regulations is serious business with language like “water used for irrigation purposes shall not be allowed to run off of a site” and several hundred dollar fines.

“Increasingly, nonpoint source pollution, like irrigation runoff, is coming under scrutiny by these folks, as they move to reduce the impacts of urban development,” Lander said.

Landscape and irrigation professionals who aren't familiar with nonpoint source pollution are behind the times—and missing out on a big opportunity to



One area at the U.S. Botanic Garden in Washington D.C. demonstrates “rainscaping.”

partner with water quality managers and officials in pursuit of green

infrastructure projects, he said.

“It's all the little things around us that in aggregate can have a big impact,” Lander said. “It's about identifying what's helpful for us so we can work with the other people who can help us to control it.”

Again, Lander stated the onus is on the professional irrigation community to step up and participate. Why? “Cities need green infrastructure and green infrastructure will need smart irrigation,” he said.

The Ticker:

IRRIGATION

Controller manufacturer **Galcon** acquired **Cyber Rain**, makers of WaterSense-certified controllers. Cyber Rain will become part of Galcon USA and it will continue to market products under the Cyber Rain brand.

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The Irrigation Association (IA) created a resource page on its website for the California drought, which the state's Gov. Jerry Brown declared an emergency in January. This page links to drought resources and details the IA's activity in the face of the drought. The association plans to update the page regularly. Visit irrigation.org/2014_California_Drought/ for more information.



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