

Resilience Certification for Stormwater Professionals, a Pilot Program
Concept Paper by Yestermorrow Design/Build School & Friends of the Mad River
to address a need identified by the Ridge to River Taskforce
5/4/17

Overview

This concept proposes to pilot a market-driven Resilience Certification program for private stormwater professionals (such as earth moving contractors, engineers, and landscape architects) in the Mad River Valley that are committed to best management practices for stormwater. The program would be administered by the Yestermorrow Design/Build School in partnership with Friends of the Mad River and the Ridge to River Taskforce. The program will test the viability of a certification approach to transforming the contractor, engineer, landscaper services markets towards practices that promote storm resilience and clean water. If successful, Yestermorrow and the Friends of the Mad River will work with partners such as the Vermont Clean Water Network, the Green Stormwater Roundtable, and Resilient Vermont to scale the certification across the state of Vermont.

Background

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, stormwater runoff is the leading cause of water pollution in the US. In Vermont, stormwater runoff has led to unacceptably high levels pollutants such as phosphorus in rivers and lakes. Vermont is also vulnerable to flooding and erosion from extreme weather events like Tropical Storm Irene, which caused \$733 million in damage.

Vermont's Act 64, the "Clean Water Act" calls for new stormwater discharge permits for new and existing developments that meet certain thresholds and municipal roads that are "hydrologically connected." While these regulatory approaches are critical to reducing runoff and erosion, the Act does not address practices for private single-home owners or managers. The Mad River Valley, like many watersheds in Vermont, has a large number of residents that live on high elevations and ridges. Many of these residents have dirt driveways and other landscape features that contribute a significant amount of sediment-laden runoff. While best management practices for stormwater have been published for homeowners, there are no regulations or market mechanisms to drive their adoption and there are few contractors who understand the principles.

Key Tasks

The project will establish an advisory board of stormwater experts throughout the state to guide the development of a certification and training program. The advisory board will begin with a review of similar certification programs in comparable watershed environments. For example, the Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional (CBLP) certification program launched in 2016 to "create a network of certified professionals who will be better stormwater partners and environmental stewards." The program has since expanded from Chesapeake Bay to Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia.

Once the review is completed, the core partners - Friends of the Mad River, Ridge to River, and Yestermorrow - together with the advisory board, will determine whether to adopt a program like CBPL, or to develop a new program for Vermont. Certification standards and a training program will then be developed and piloted with stormwater professionals who work in the Mad River Valley. The training program will use peer-learning methods where appropriate to encourage sharing best practices within the training cohort. The training program will include defined learning objectives and a certification exam.

A marketing program for certified stormwater professionals will be developed. The program will include logos for use in contractor marketing materials, and a community-based social marketing program to encourage local residents to hire landscaping contractors that are certified under the program.

Success will be measured by feedback forms and one-on-one interviews with program participants. Program participants will be surveyed once per quarter for 12 months to determine if the program increased their business. Clients of program participants will also be interviewed to determine what motivated them to hire the contractor, and whether or not they were satisfied with the service.

Once sufficient data has been collected on the efficacy of the program, the core team and advisory board will develop a program plan to scale the certification program statewide. The launch of the statewide program will be considered a later phase of the project.