

# OurRiver Newsletter | December 2009



OurRiver – the Cooks River Sustainability Initiative – is about communities, businesses and councils working together in a new way for the long-term improvement of the Cooks River Catchment – reducing pollution, developing sustainable water sources and creating water savvy communities.

OurRiver is a project funded by the NSW Environmental Trust Urban Sustainability Program that was initiated by the Cooks River Foreshores Working Group. OurRiver is a partnership of eight councils within the Cooks River Catchment (Ashfield, Bankstown, Canterbury, City of Sydney, Hurstville, Marrickville, Rockdale, Strathfield) and Monash University. The goal of OurRiver is to establish the Cooks River Catchment as a leading model of collaborative urban water management. Using six small local areas (called subcatchments), OurRiver will show how communities and councils, working together in varied and highly urbanised contexts, can improve their social and water environments and create long-term sustainable water management plans.

## Event Wrap-Up: Are you water wise?

In November, OurRiver ran tours of the Ashbury and Upper Wolli Creek Subcatchments, where participants had the opportunity to observe examples of water-sensitive urban design in their local area. The image above is from the Upper Wolli Creek Tour, where Subcatchment residents Peter Stevens and Deb Little welcomed us into their backyard to show us their rainwater tanks, which keep their productive veggie garden growing strong. Other sites we visited included Pratten Park, where Ashfield Council harvests stormwater to irrigate playing fields, and the Illawara Road raingardens where community members told us how they have been involved in the raingarden's construction and maintenance. We've had a great response to these tours and are planning to hold more in the new year; watch our website for details.

## Upcoming Events:

**Water Wise Contest!** Share your best home water saving tip and you could win a \$50 voucher. Email tips to [ourriver@strathfield.nsw.gov.au](mailto:ourriver@strathfield.nsw.gov.au). Details at [www.ourriver.com.au](http://www.ourriver.com.au) or by calling 9748 9635.

## Jargon Buster

What is **stormwater**? Stormwater describes water from rain storms. Naturally, rainwater permeates into the ground; however, when rainwater hits paved surfaces it cannot be absorbed so becomes run-off.

What is **biofiltration**? Biofiltration is the use of vegetation and natural materials (including bacteria) to trap and remove pollutants. Raingardens are examples of biofiltration.

What is a **raingarden**? Raingardens are special gardens designed to filter stormwater and slow the speed at which stormwater reaches a waterway. Raingardens are placed in sites so that stormwater run-off will pass through them. Raingardens contain plants and layers of soil and sandy gravel that help soak up and filter stormwater. Anyone can create a raingarden. The ABC website has a video where John Patrick describes how to build a raingarden to filter the stormwater coming off your roof. View it at: [http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/video/video\\_index\\_July2008.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/video/video_index_July2008.htm)

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# Project Update

Over the last two months, OurRiver has made significant progress towards project goals. A survey of local businesses within each subcatchment was completed, the final planning forum was held, two water wise tours for residents were conducted, and drafts of the subcatchment management plans were begun.

**Context Mapping:** To develop solutions appropriate for the different natural features and communities in each subcatchment, detailed research was undertaken to understand their local context.

## Physical Context

OurRiver has completed examining physical features relevant to water in each subcatchment, such as land-use, current water use, and how much of the area is covered by paved surfaces.

## Social Context

Businesses in each subcatchment were surveyed on their knowledge, attitudes and behaviour related to water. More than 200 businesses took part in a telephone survey. The majority of respondents (75%) believed their business has an important role in protecting the local environment. Most businesses surveyed (82%) were receptive to using recycled wastewater for appropriate uses. Many businesses (69%) leased their property, and this often meant that they felt they had little control or responsibility over their business' water and energy consumption. For many leased properties, water usage was included in the rent, so respondents were unaware of their water usage or its cost.

**“I knew nothing previously about ‘raingardens’ but now see how powerful they can be to stop flooding and erosion.”**

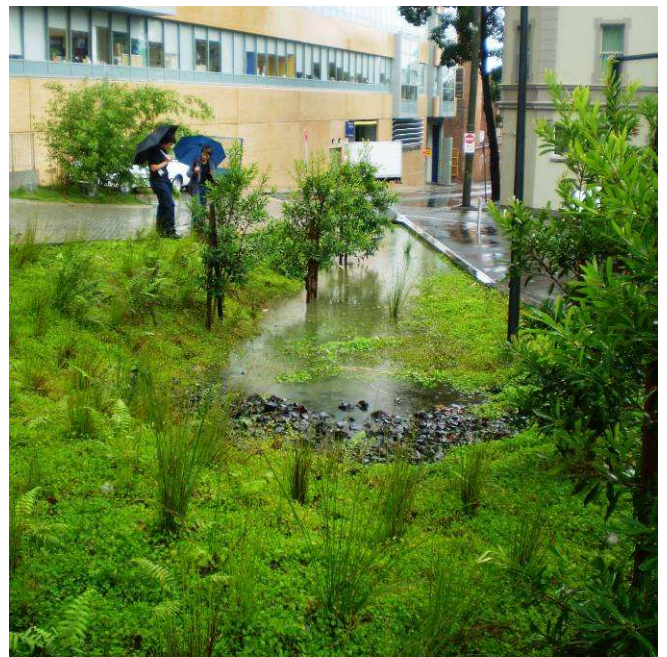
Comment from a resident who took part in an OurRiver Water Sensitive Urban Design Tour.

## Organisational Context

OurRiver partners from Monash University are conducting surveys, interviews, and discussion sessions with all partner councils. Across the eight partner councils, more than 500 staff participated in surveys, which will provide councils with information on opportunities within their organisation to improve water management.

Subcatchment Planning Booklets with context mapping results are available by request or on the Publications page at [www.ourriver.com.au](http://www.ourriver.com.au).

**Collaborative Planning:** Vision sessions and planning forums have been held in all subcatchments. Residents and other stakeholders developed water visions and interim goals that work towards reaching the long-term vision. A common theme from these sessions was a desire for community education about urban water problems. See the reverse page for how we've begun addressing this need.



Large raingarden in Darlinghurst near St. Vincent's Hospital.

## Subcatchment Management Plans:

Subcatchment Management Plan drafts are being prepared based on the visions and goals developed at the vision sessions and planning forums. To jumpstart implementation, OurRiver is contributing funds to on-ground works such as raingardens and stormwater collection and re-use projects. OurRiver is currently assessing construction proposals in each subcatchment.

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