

Protection of Water Quality SEEPs to Local Level by Kate Wilson

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The Stormwater and Erosion Education Program (SEEP) is an instructive course developed specifically for the Panhandle, and it is coming to Bonner County soon! It will benefit workers in all fields of construction, excavation, design, development, county public works and planning, as well as anyone involved in growth or water quality issues.

Incentives for gearing up on your stormwater and erosion education include: increasing marketability and skills, the ability to troubleshoot your own construction site, reducing building costs by implementing "Best Management Practices" right the first time, avoiding hefty fines from the EPA or stop work orders, and, demonstrating to your clients a commitment to quality through education.

The idea for SEEP came about a few years ago when a contractor contacted several agencies with the concern the current growth rate and associated construction activities had the potential to harm our region's water resources. He suggested that erosion sediment control training would benefit construction site operators by providing the tools they need to successfully and economically manage their construction sites while protecting the region's water resources.

Here in Bonner County, some local folks have been instrumental in the protection effort. Steve Meglich, owner of Hard Rock Excavating, and certified SEEP trainer, says he has been seeing some pretty poor practices in the field. "Incorrect installation and application of BMPs, as well as little or no thought for erosion control are common problems" around these parts, he says.

With the help of several contractors and agencies, Panhandle Health District started forming a committee, balanced with industry and agency personnel, to explore the erosion-sediment control training program idea. After delivering over 600 surveys to people in the field and soliciting the input of three focus groups around the Panhandle, the committee formed the concept and philosophy of SEEP.

"This is a homegrown program developed for our five northern counties by our five northern county community," says Annette Duerock, environmental health specialist for the Panhandle Health District. "This has been an extraordinary team effort with many people, both industry and agency, donating their time and resources to developing and delivering a training program."

In May of 2005 the SEEP steering committee began meeting to make decisions on the structure of the program. This committee is comprised of numerous private industry representatives, agencies, and interest groups, including the North Idaho Building Contractors Association, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, conservation districts, and representatives from all five northern counties. Local industry such as Panhandle Area Council, CDF Landscape Professionals,

Inc., K.E. Hicks and Associates, Lakes Construction, Forest Ventures, Inc., Solid Rock Excavating, Elliott Environmental, Arrow Construction Supply, Contech and many more, dedicated tremendous amounts of time and resources to the process.

Funding for the program has come from all over the Panhandle, from sources such as the IDEQ, the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts, Tri-State Water Quality Council, Lakes Highway District, Post Falls Highway District and Public Works, Shoshone County, Coeur d'Alene Stormwater Utility, Sandpoint Public Works, and even a private citizen. This diverse list of sponsors indicates the need, recognized by many, for better practices to protect our resources. With the rapid increase of growth and development in our region, more education is needed to keep the land in place and the waters clean.

Some folks think that because Lake Pend Oreille is so large, their pollution won't really impact the waters. This is false. "It's the accumulative effect that is devastating," says Meglich, who has worked in the building industry for over 25 years. "Even if we're taking micro-steps to correct these problems, it's progress."

Consultants were hired to compile the manual for the classes, which is included in the registration fee. This manual contains important information on why protecting our resources, such as water quality, is such a good idea, and load of information on current regulations and BMPs. So even after you take the class, you will have material to refer to, also consisting of a field guide and current contact information for agencies and other resources.

Duerock cites the greatest success of the program so far as the collection of amazing people that have made this program happen. "If we don't start protecting our resources, we will be extremely challenged in a short amount of time." She points out that it is not only our water resources at risk, but human and economic resources as well. The three are inextricably linked, "impact one - the rest suffer."

Since the time the committee first started planning the classes, they have come a long way. The first class has already been held for the basic SEEP class, in Shoshone County, and the Benewah, Kootenai, and Bonner County classes are coming soon!

The basic SEEP class is a day-and-a-half long, with the classroom session on the first day, which will include information on the nature of erosion and the water cycle, stormwater and erosion regulatory requirements, site assessment and planning, and BMP instruction. Lunch is provided. On the second day, there is a field session where students implement the BMPs they learned the day before, which includes the proper installation of wattles, slope drains, hydro mulching, check dams, silt fences, and more. An exam is then held so that students may become "SEEP certified."

Due to the voluntary nature of the class, it may be a slower process. People have to want to learn more about their profession and how poor practices, such as implementing inappropriate BMPs for the project site, greatly impact our precious resources.

"Education itself is a slightly slower process," says Duerock. "But gradually, people will realize that there is a huge benefit."

The Bonner County class will be held on April 24 and 25 at the Federal Building in Sandpoint (1500 Hwy 2). It is intended to serve both Boundary and Bonner County residents. The class will accommodate up to 25 students at a cost of \$200 per person. Area agencies, including the counties, will retain a list of "SEEP certified" professionals, thus escalating your local marketability.

For more information about registering for the class, please contact Nelle Coler (Panhandle Area Council) at 208-772-0584 ex.3012, or email her at nelle@pacni.org. The SEEP steering committee has big plans to offer advanced classes in the future, to further expand the knowledge base of local contractors and developers. A prerequisite to the advanced classes will be the attendance of this first basic SEEP class, so be sure to register while there is still room.

Whether you work in the field or just know folks who do, spread the word about this new, non-regulatory, instructional class on stormwater and erosion. It has the potential to benefit everyone, from contractors and developers to agencies, and the public too, in protection of our water and quality of life.

For additional tips on stormwater management, you can also see the Pend Oreille Lake*A*Syst manual, available at the library. Call or email Gary Parker, program coordinator, for more information on Lake*A*Syst at 208-263-5310, [gary.parker\(at\)id.nacdnet.net](mailto:gary.parker@id.nacdnet.net).

Kate Wilson is a Project Journalist for Avista's Clark Fork Project. She has been interested in environmental issues since she was a youngster.