The Cane Run Project

The Cane Run Watershed Assessment and Restoration Project is a collaborative effort to develop and implement a watershed-based plan and improve water quality. The project, led by the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, focuses on nonpoint source pollution, which is pollution that comes from runoff throughout the watershed rather than one specific pipe or location.

Landowners, residents, and other stakeholders in the watershed have a variety of concerns about the Cane Run Watershed, including poor water quality, flooding, aesthetics, litter, karst features, and the impact of land uses on groundwater.

With participation from these stakeholders, the University of Kentucky has developed a watershed-based plan to guide implementation of water quality best management practices (BMPs) and to plan education and outreach activities.

Pollution

Segments of the Cane Run Creek are polluted with high levels of pathogens, nutrients, and sediment. This pollution has caused the Cane Run Creek and several of its tributaries to be listed among Kentucky’s impaired streams.

Land in the watershed has a variety of uses, including dense urban development; large industrial campuses; commercial complexes; and agricultural row crops, pastures, and hayfields. Pollution in the Cane Run Watershed is a result of storm water runoff from these land uses as well as failing sewer systems.

Partnerships are essential for successful watershed restoration. Partners in the Cane Run Watershed Project include:

- Cane Run Watershed Council
- University of Kentucky
- Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government
- Lexmark International
- Kentucky Horse Park
- Bluegrass PRIDE
- Bluegrass Partnership for a Green Community
- Kentucky Division of Water
- Kentucky Water Resources Research Institute
- Fayette and Scott County schools
- Friends of Cane Run

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The Cane Run Watershed is located in central Kentucky in Fayette and Scott counties. This 28,000-acre watershed includes a portion of the city of Lexington, a University of Kentucky research farm, and the Kentucky Horse Park. Like other watersheds, it is a land area that drains water into a common lake or stream—in this case, the Cane Run Creek. Because the Cane Run Watershed has karst features, water that enters the Cane Run Creek can take one of two paths—the water may flow into the Royal Spring Aquifer or eventually enter the North Elkhorn Creek. The Royal Spring Aquifer is a source of drinking water for Georgetown, Ky., making the Cane Run Watershed an important water resource for the region.

Restoration

Project partners are working to recommend, plan, and implement best management practices in the watershed on both agricultural and urban properties. Agricultural BMPs include restricting livestock from the stream, enhancing streamside vegetation, and reducing erosion with grade control structures. Urban BMPs include rain gardens, rain barrels, and other runoff controls. In addition, thousands of trees have been planted in the watershed to restore streamside habitat and reduce pollution movement into the Cane Run Creek.

Education and Outreach

Through the Cane Run Watershed Council, the project is promoting an increased awareness among residents, visitors, and businesses about their impact on the watershed and how they can participate in restoration efforts. Recent education projects include installing signs along the Legacy Trail (a recreational trail that crosses the Cane Run Creek at numerous locations), conducting Cane Run Watershed festivals, working with students in schools within the watershed, and hosting events to remove invasive species and clean up streams.