STORMWATER

Tip of the Week

Week 4: January 25, 2022

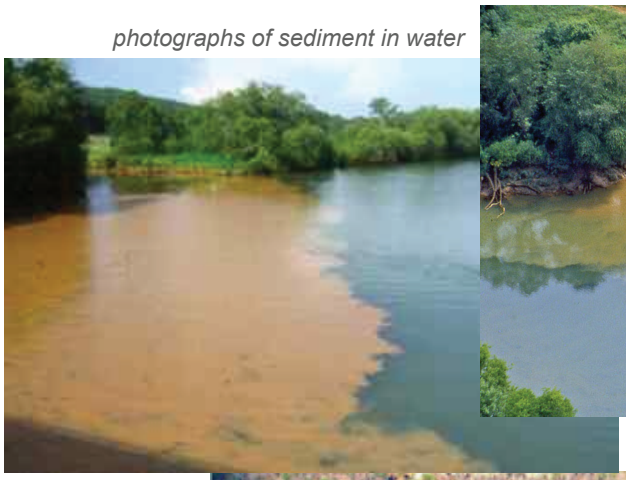
SEDIMENT & WATERSHEDS

Sediment is one of the top contributing factors to Nonpoint Source Pollution, but what is sediment and why is it so harmful to our watersheds?

WHAT IS SEDIMENT?

Sediment is a naturally occurring material that is broken down by processes of weathering and erosion, and is subsequently transported by the action of wind, water, or ice or by the force of gravity acting on the particles. Sediments are most often transported by water, butalso wind and glaciers.

photographs of sediment in water



Sediment (loose soil) includes silt (fine particles) and suspended solids (larger particles). Sediment may enter surface waters from eroding stream banks and from surface runoff due to improper plant cover on urban and rural land. Sediment creates turbidity (cloudiness) in bodies of water, reducing the amount of light reaching lower depths, which can inhibit growth of submerged aquatic plants and consequently affect species which are dependent on them, such as fish and shellfish. High turbidity levels also inhibit drinking water purification systems and sediment can clog these systems.

DID YOU KNOW?

So much sediment is carried during storms that over one-half of all the sediment moved during a year might be transported during a single storm period. Storms can of course deliver large amounts of water to a river, but did you know they also bring along lots of eroded soil and debris from the surrounding landscape? Rocks as small as tiny clay particles and larger that are moved by the water are called sediment. Fast-moving water can pick up, suspend, and move larger particles more easily than slow-moving waters. This is why rivers are more muddy-looking during storms—they are carrying a LOT more sediment than they carry during a low-flow period.

WHAT CAN I DO?

No matter the scale of the situation, sediment can cause many issues. If you live on a river, stream, or lake take a look at the bank for signs of erosion. Planting native vegetation along your banks is a great way to help prevent the banks from washing in, causing sediment from bank erosion. Doing some work to your property? Be cautious with disturbing dirt and be mindful that if it rains, it will wash away. Use silt fencing or fiber rolls to keep sediment from washing into waterways or stormdrains.