Mobile Area Water & Sewer System
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MAWSS Begins $1.1 Million EPA Project at Tricentennial Park

Mobile Area Water & Sewer System (MAWSS) launched a $1.7 million dollar demonstration project at Lake Drive Tricentennial Park on June 1, which should make it the *greenest* park in the city. A $1.1 million grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is funding the majority of the project, which is the first of its kind in the nation. MAWSS contributed $635 thousand.

The park, located off Stanton Road, gained additional eye appeal with nearly a mile of new walking trails, bridges and landscaping added as part of the grant. What's not visible is the state-of-the-art underground drip irrigation system that's using treated wastewater to nourish the grass and shrubbery. The irrigation system is part of MAWSS' innovative demonstration project that will prove decentralized wastewater management systems can be effective within large urban sewer systems.

Onsite or decentralized wastewater management systems collect, treat and dispose of wastewater, at or near the point of generation. Environmentally better than septic tanks, the technology has enabled MAWSS and other utilities to bring sewer service to fast growing areas of the county without adding new sewer lines. What's unique about *this* project is that it is using onsite technology *within* MAWSS central system and using the effluent to beautify the park.

Wastewater will be intercepted or "mined" from the sewer line along Three Mile Creek near St. Stephens Rd. and purified using one of three different decentralized systems. Each system will be evaluated for its treatment effectiveness and cost. An ultraviolet disinfection treatment will also be tested on the treated flow. The purified liquid will then be distributed through an underground state-of-the-art drip irrigation system to nourish the grass and shrubs in the park. Approximately 40-thousand gallons of wastewater will be treated on site each day.

MAWSS Executive Director W. Malcolm Steeves says the project is drawing national interest because of its environmental benefits and widespread application to other water systems.

"We've basically taken wastewater from our sewer system, treated it on site and made it a resource to irrigate the park. This offers tremendous potential for communities with limited water supplies and could be a means of providing green space in those communities," said Steeves. 'At the same time, we're reducing the amount of water that has to be treated in our wastewater treatment facilities and eliminated some of the effluent that would normally have been discharged into Gulf Coast surface waters."

The reduction in flow to the treatment plant gives MAWSS added capacity without the need for infrastructure expansion or development. Using treated wastewater for irrigation also preserves drinking water that would have been used for the same purpose.

Harold Baker, senior project manager for Volkert and Associates, Inc., who designed and built the system, believes it could provide positive change in the environment.

“Removing 40-thousand gallons from the sewer treatment plant is not in itself a great reduction, but if you did this in several locations in the city and duplicated it across the country, the potential for reducing the amount of wastewater that has to be treated and then discharged could be substantial”, said Baker.

Dr. Kevin White with the University of South Alabama’s Department of Civil Engineering, will evaluate the three treatment systems and monitor ground and surface water for any environmental impact. One of the initial proponents of the project, he’s seeing national, as well as international interest, as the project grows.

“Now, in addition to having EPA on board, we’re getting calls from people in Sydney, Australia wanting to come see what we’re doing because they might be interested in it there. It’s environmentally friendly, it’s cost effective and it provides a benefit to the community. There are a lot of win-wins in this project,” said White.

As part of the project, one-half mile of landscaped walkways were added along Three Mile Creek. A sidewalk extends around Day Lake. Mobile District 1 Councilmember Fred Richardson presided at the dedication ceremony to open the new walkways which were named in honor of Irmatean Y.Watson, the district’s first elected councilmember. A permanent plaque, honoring Rev. Joseph Day for his efforts to save the lake was also unveiled.

“This has been a wonderful collaborative effort between Mobile Area Water & Sewer System and the City of Mobile,” said Mobile’s District 1 Councilmember Fred Richardson. “The citizens will enjoy the benefits of the project for years to come.”

Data will be collected on the project for the next two years, but residents won’t have to wait that long to see results. MAWSS officials believe the park should be visibly greener by the end of the summer.

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