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Reedy Creek will be city's largest stream restoration at \$5 million and 5 acres

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Charlotte stormwater officials are laying the groundwork for the city's largest stream restoration, in and around the 737-acre Reedy Creek Nature Preserve.

The \$5 million project will restore 7.5 miles of streams and 5 acres of wetlands in and around the county-owned preserve.

The Mecklenburg County settlers who first occupied the rolling terrain in the mid-1700s wouldn't recognize the miles of streams that lace it.

Those streams now funnel stormwater that surges off surrounding roads and rooftops. Streambeds have cut deeply into the earth. The steep banks are eroding, sending fine sediment into the creek and making life hard for fish and the aquatic insects they feed on.

The project will aim to fix that problem, returning streams to their natural contours and restoring floodplains' ability to slow stormwater deluges.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Storm Water Services has growing experience in stream restorations. There are 36 restorations the agency has completed, has underway or plans.

Like most Mecklenburg County streams, Reedy Creek is classified as impaired because it supports little aquatic life. One of the goals of the restoration project is to not just make the preserve's streams look natural again, but to give them life again.

"It's a learning lab," said Kristen O'Reilly, a city water quality education specialist. "Is it possible in an urban environment to restore the aquatic life?"

Scientists at UNC Charlotte have monitored the streams' biological and chemical properties since 2011. That work will continue after the restoration.

The project will restore the life-giving riffles and pools, rocks and logs that streams naturally have.

"We try to think about what nature would do, and do that," said Jarrod Karl, who oversees Charlotte's stream and wetlands mitigation program.

The mitigation bank, which will fund the Reedy Creek project, holds "credits" generated when Storm Water Services does restoration projects. City or county infrastructure projects can then buy the credits to offset the environmental damage they cause.

Design work on the project is beginning now. The city expects to buy about 70 acres in conservation easements around the preserve, beginning in February.

Construction, which will involve large machinery and trees being cut down, will begin in late 2016 and take a year or two. Trees and shrubs will be replanted once the work is done.

Wildlands Engineering and stream restoration contractor North State Environmental will do the work. Project

updates will be posted at <http://reedycreekrestoration.com>.

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