Glossary

Bioswale: A long, gently sloping depression or ditch planted with vegetation that slows stormwater runoff and allows water to drain into the ground or be absorbed by plants. This process breaks down, filters and removes many stormwater pollutants.

Combined Sewers: Sewers that collect and convey both sanitary wastewater and stormwater runoff.

Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO): This describes the event that happens when stormwater and sewage (which mix in combined sewer pipes) overflow into the Illinois River.

Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU): Also called an Equivalent Runoff Unit. In relation to municipal stormwater management, this unit of measurement reflects the average amount of impervious surface area of parcels in a municipality. It is shown in square feet. Stormwater managers may use the ERU as a basis for figuring the fees that property owners contribute, since it relates to the amount of stormwater runoff they are contributing to the system.

Erosion: The wearing down or washing away of the soil and land surface by the action of water, wind or ice.

Green Infrastructure: Best management practices (such as bioretention and permeable pavement) that use an approach to water management that protects, restores or mimics the natural water cycle.

Impervious: A surface that water cannot penetrate, such as streets, buildings and parking lots.

Long-Term Control Plan: These are required under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's combined sewer overflow policy to reduce the frequency, duration and intensity of CSO events.

Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s): A system used to collect and convey stormwater that is owned by a public entity and discharges to waters of the U.S.

National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES): Under the Clean Water Act, this permit system regulates point sources of pollution.

Permeability: A measure of the ability of a porous material to transmit fluids through it.

Rain Garden: A shallow, surface depressed planted area with selected native vegetation that is designed to absorb rainwater runoff from impervious services, such as roofs, driveways and sidewalks.

Sanitary Sewers: Sewers that carry only domestic and/or industrial wastewater.

Sanitary Sewer Overflow (SSO): Discharge of raw sewage from a sanitary sewer system.

Sediment: A naturally occurring material that is transported by the action of fluids, such as water or ice, that consists mainly of particles derived from rocks, soil and organic materials.

Septic System: A wastewater treatment system into which wastes are piped directly from the home into the ground; consists of a septic tank and drain field; wastewater is exposed to bacteria that decompose the organic waste, dead bacteria and sediment settle to the bottom of the tank, and effluent flows out into the ground through drainage pipes.

Sewage: Liquid and solid waste from residential and commercial drains and toilets.

Storm Drain Pipe: Also referred to as a storm sewer, a system designed to drain excess rain and groundwater from paved streets, parking lots, sidewalks and roofs.

Storm Sewers: Sewers that carry only stormwater runoff.

Stormwater: Rainwater after it reaches the earth.

Stormwater Runoff: Water from rain or melted snow that runs over land surfaces. Stormwater runoff picks up soil, pesticides, cigarette butts, litter, oil, dissolved metals and other pollutants and washes them into storm drains, rivers and streams.

Watershed: Another word for river basin; an area of land that drains into a common body of water (creek, stream, river or lake).