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ONONDAGA COUNTY SAVES THE RAIN: A COMPREHENSIVE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT: In January 1998, Onondaga County in Central New York entered into an amended consent judgment (ACJ) with NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Atlantic States Legal Foundation (ASLF) and the County's Department of Water Environment Protection (WEP). The ACJ resolved the claims by NYS DEC and ASLF that WEP had violated the federal Clean Water Act and the NYS Environmental Conservation Law, article 17. In November 2009, the ACJ was amended to include green infrastructure (GI) projects that will reduce the frequency and volume of CSOs. The new consent order uses a combination of traditional gray solutions--which include storage facilities and pipes--and green infrastructure to capture stormwater and prevent run-off. It replaced plans to build large regional treatment facilities that met public resistance because of environmental justice concerns due to the location of planned facilities. This ACJ made Onondaga County the first municipality in the country to be mandated to use GI to address its CSO problems. The plans include a commitment to capture 95% total annual volume by 2018. The plan includes demonstration projects, monitoring and data collection, incentive programs, community education and outreach. By 2018, Syracuse will be ahead of Portland, Philadelphia, and Seattle in terms of GI coverage. CH2MHill, the engineering firm for Onondaga County, has worked with the County and the City of Syracuse, NY to develop a GI implementation plan that runs through 2018. Some of the preliminary components of the GI plan have already been implemented and positive results are being realized in nearby Onondaga Lake. Onondaga County, through its Save the Rain program, has committed to Project 50, the installation of at least 50 green infrastructure projects in 2011. These projects include one of the largest green roofs in the Northeast, a rainwater reuse system to make ice for the local hockey team and an urban treatment wetland. Onondaga County has also set-up a green infrastructure reimbursement program for businesses and non-profits and a residential rain barrel giveaway program. This presentation will review the background of the ACJ, current projects, outreach and education and the collaborative approach taken by this program.

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