

# Ex-stream Makeover

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Water changes everything. It feeds life in ecosystems and wears away the earth.

But when water channels become unhealthy, they can affect everything from the creatures living in them to the surrounding ecosystems. That's where the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service's recent project comes in.

The extension service has partnered with state and federal environmental agencies, Auburn University and the City of Auburn, among others, to rebuild a stream in Town Creek Park off South Gay Street.

The agency recently received approximately \$200,000 in state and federal grants to demonstrate new technologies in restoring the stream.

"It looks at more than just trying to make it attractive - it physically restores its function," project organizer Eve Brantley said.

Probably because of poor agricultural practices decades ago, she said, the stream in the park has turned into more of a ditch - deeper, less curvy and, thus, less hospitable to plants and animals that would normally live there.

To restore it, the partnering agencies have taken the blueprints of nearby healthy streams.

"We put that together to create engineering plans," she said. "It's not a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants approach ... We take that information and put it into a whole new stream."



Once water is diverted into the new stream, workers will fill in the old stream.

By creating a shallower stream, the agencies will create a healthier stream, allowing it to overflow its banks onto flood plains. By flooding, the stream deposits excess silt and creates a healthier environment for ecosystems within its banks and without, Brantley said.

"It's a great opportunity for a demonstration project," she said. "A lot of people use that park. We couldn't have

asked for a better location. I think it serves as a great example of the work we can do to improve a stream."

One benefit of the new approach to renovating streams is the cost, or lack thereof, Brantley said. Often, the new techniques cost the same or less than other manmade methods of controlling a stream, such as riprap or concrete.

"It takes advantage of natural features that will make the stream more functional and more attractive," she said.

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