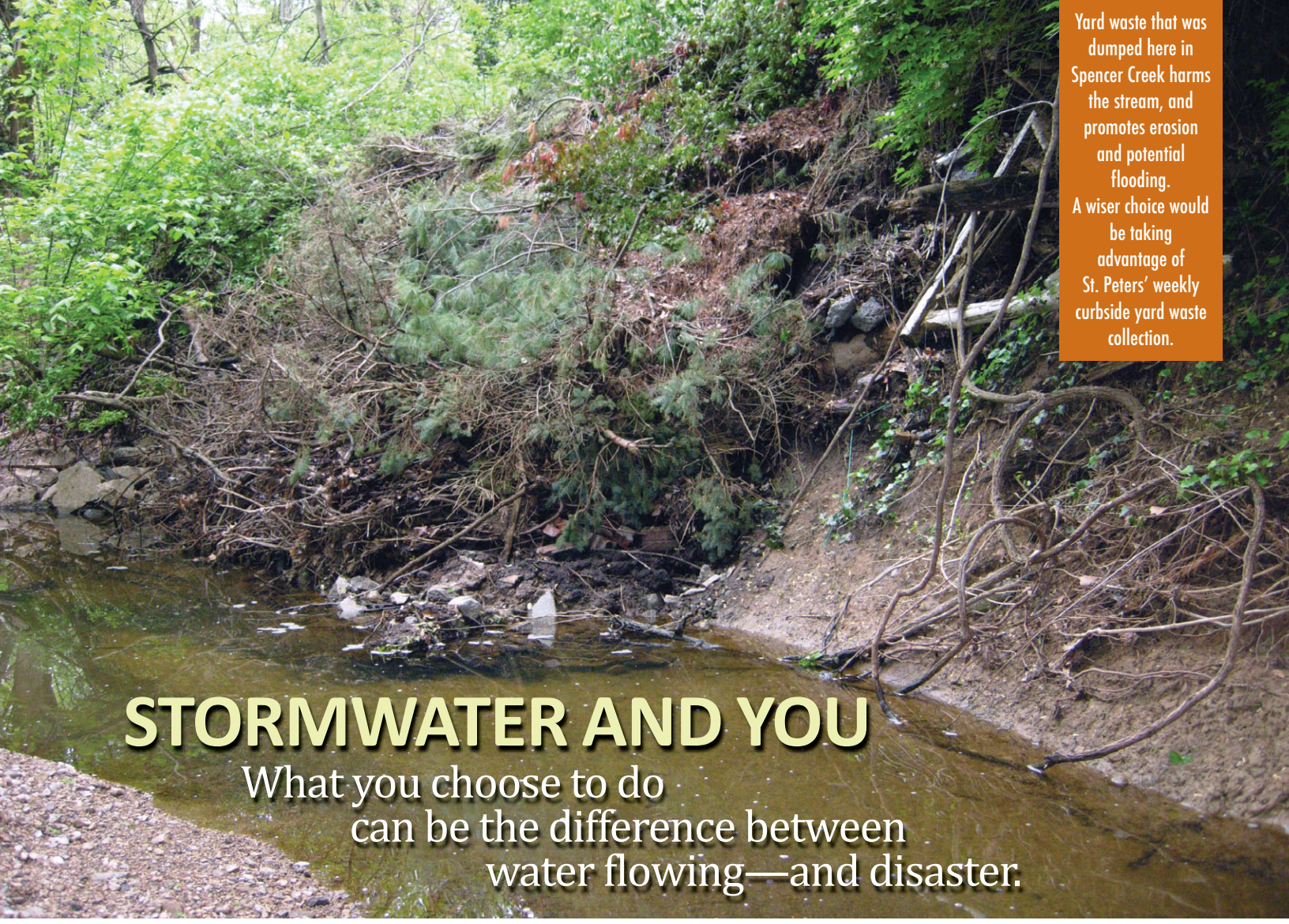

Yard waste that was dumped here in Spencer Creek harms the stream, and promotes erosion and potential flooding. A wiser choice would be taking advantage of St. Peters' weekly curbside yard waste collection.

STORMWATER AND YOU

What you choose to do can be the difference between water flowing—and disaster.

Think about your neighborhood landscape. What do you see? Homes, driveways, streets and perhaps sidewalks come to mind. Lawns and gardens, too. Do you think about the storm sewers on your street? Is there a stream nearby?

The next time it rains, watch the water as it runs off hard surfaces. Where does it go? Some of it absorbs into lawns and gardens. But, you can see much of the stormwater run into the street, where gutters take it to a storm sewer drain. The drain could look like a grate or an inlet with a manhole. From there, the stormwater moves through storm sewer pipes to a nearby stream.

All of those elements, from your property to your neighbor's property to the street to the storm sewer to the stream, play a part in the stormwater management, flood control and the health of our environment—and your neighborhood.

"I think most people know that it's a bad idea to litter our neighborhoods with trash," said Mayor Len Pagano. "But, the same can be said about yard waste. In fact, if someone dumps yard waste into the street or a storm sewer or a creek, the result could be disastrous. What you may think is no big deal can cause erosion and flooding that hurts many people and their properties."

During a recent assessment of St. Peters' creeks, we discovered some alarming trends that we need to reverse.

"The biggest problem we have right now, which can be corrected at no cost to our residents, is the vegetation that's dumped into streams," said Bill Malach, the City of St. Peters' Group Manager in charge of Water Environment Services. "When someone dumps yard waste into a stream or near the stream bank, it can destroy the underlying vegetation whose roots are holding the soil in place along the stream bank. Once the vegetation root structure dies, erosion begins."

You've probably heard examples of how introducing a new species of animal can alter a habitat. Well, adding chemical elements can do the same, and that's exactly what happens when yard waste is dumped along the stream bank—it introduces a high level of nitrogen and phosphorous into the stream, which decreases the stream's water quality and affects the stream's habitat.

From there, the problem graduates from an ecological issue to a neighborhood issue. An unhealthy stream bank will erode, and if you're dumping yard waste behind your home, that erosion can eventually eat into your property. Then, you're facing a potential calamity that could impact your home and safety.

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Stormwater flows into storm drains like this one. Lawn clippings, leaves, trash, etc., left in the street can clog storm drains and cause flooding.

Stormwater and You | *continued from previous page*

With erosion comes the potential for flooding. Eroded banks can cause trees and other vegetation to fall into the stream, creating a bottleneck point. During a heavy downpour, the stormwater may back up and come out of the stream.

At this point, the "easy" choice of dumping yard waste creates some hard lessons about the importance of a healthy stormwater management system. You might learn, firsthand, about flooding.

If you have a stream behind your home, you can also help preserve the stream by leaving a natural vegetated buffer between your manicured lawn and the top of the stream bank. This reduces the chance for erosion because the buffer slows down stormwater runoff from your lawn so that it doesn't rush down the side of the stream bank. A natural buffer can also improve the stream water quality by filtering pollutant runoff from the lawn. Typical pollutants from lawns include fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides, and pet waste.

Litter and junk can collect in one area of a stream, causing a bottleneck that can block stormwater and create flooding concerns. In this photo, debris gathers in a tributary leading to the West Drive detention basin.

It's unfortunate, but sometimes people also decide to take the "easy" way out for trash disposal. St. Peters workers have actually found large household items shoved into storm sewer drains, and Clean Streams volunteers regularly spot bicycles, tires and other bulky items in our creeks. If these storm sewers or streams are clogged with trash, a heavy rain can cause significant flooding and damage. (See Clean Stream Day story on page 16.)

There's no reason to dump trash or yard waste in St. Peters. As a resident, you receive two-times-weekly trash collection and once-per-week yard waste collection service. Plus, you can schedule bulky item pickup four times a year. And, you can bring recyclable items to Recycle City and yard waste to Earth Centre, both located on Ecology Drive off Mid Rivers Mall Drive north of I-70. Earth Centre is open every day except holidays and Sundays during winter. Recycle City has a convenient drop-off center open during daylight hours, seven days a week.

Some people unwittingly cause stormwater problems because they don't think about the big picture. Do you ever see people who blow their cut grass into the street while mowing the lawn, or who blow leaves into the street? This also presents a problem. It's important to keep your lawn clippings and leaves out of the street, because they will make their way down the street into your storm sewer pipes, clogging up the drainage system that you need to work during the next rainfall.

The brush and limbs you see here in Spencer Creek were either dumped down the side of the stream or fell into the creek after being stacked at the top of the bank. When yard waste is placed atop a creek bank, it can kill the vegetation, and without that vegetation's root structure, the slope gives away to erosion.

When mowing, the wise choice is to "cut it high and let it lie"—which means that you put your lawn mower on a high setting and let the lawn clippings just lie in your lawn as a nitrogen source.

If you bag your lawn clippings, just take it to your curb for collection. Place it in a paper yard waste bag, or you can rent a yard waste cart from the City of St. Peters that you can easily wheel around your property and then wheel down to the curb for collection. Instead of clogging our streams with debris, the yard waste that we collect will get a new life when it's transformed into mulch or compost available for sale at Earth Centre.

Mayor Pagano added, "In St. Peters, we've always been ahead of the curve when it comes to waste management and 'going green,' but we can always do more. Please dispose of your household trash and yard waste properly. Simply by using the City services provided to us, we can help keep our environment healthy and help avoid disaster."

Dumped lawn clippings coat the bank of a Dardenne Creek tributary in St. Peters, decreasing the stream's water quality and affecting the stream's habitat by adding a high level of nitrogen and phosphorous.