

Hilger's Gulch FAQ's

Q: How will this save us money? Since the outer perimeter will remain unchanged, will we really save dollars?

A: The changes to the central gulch area are expected to save us between \$40,000 and \$80,000 over time. The exact cost savings is largely dependent on rainfall. Maintenance expenses have been as high as nearly \$50,000 in the past few years for irrigation alone. The average for mower upkeep, chemicals used for herbicides and insecticides, and fertilizers to maintain the area has cost the state an additional \$27,333. The vegetation selected for the project is more resilient than the existing vegetation. The new arrangement will not only save us money, but reduce the number of hours it takes a grounds crew member to maintain the area.

Q: Will concrete sidewalks be replaced with gravel trails?

A: The concrete sidewalks will not be replaced. We plan to develop new walking trails that will give people an opportunity to enjoy the wildflowers, trees, and shrubs up close. These new trails (shown on the map in red) will have a gravel walking surface. The current walking path will stay as is and, in fact, in an unrelated project, the path is going to be extended to Governor's Drive to connect with the city's 4th Street trails.

Q: Will the gulch lose its tranquility?

A: Actually, the project is expected to make the gulch's atmosphere even more tranquil. We hope to restore the natural habitat for the return of birds and butterflies that have been displaced. Taking a quiet stroll through the nature trails, catching a glimpse of a fawn in the grass, or stopping to watch the butterflies float from flower to flower will be a wonderful way to end a long day.

Q: Buffalo grass and blue grama have a short green period. What can we do to keep the new landscape green?

A: The buffalo/blue grama mix will require only a fraction of the water that is currently used on the Kentucky bluegrass. During the years it will take to establish the new vegetation, we will continue to water the grass. Once it is established, we can look at our options. As in any plan, there is room for reconsideration and we haven't ruled anything out. The irrigation system will remain intact, so the option is always available to occasionally water the grass.

Q: When walking the sidewalks now, I am able to see across to the opposite side of the loop. Will the new vegetation in the landscape obstruct my view?

A: People will still be able to see across the loop. The area of the gulch that will be replanted slopes significantly down toward the creek and the sidewalks are elevated. The bull rushes that are currently in the creek bed are approximately 7-8 feet tall. None of our plants or flowers will reach this height at maturity. The tallest of the ornamental trees and shrubs that will be intermittently placed throughout will be, at max, 20 feet tall at maturity, and will not be a significant obstruction.

Q: How will you manage weed control?

A: It will take diligence and maintenance to establish this new landscape. Once the native grasses are established, their tight root systems will choke out most weeds. In the meantime, we will hand pick or use herbicides if necessary.

Q: With taller grass near the paved sidewalks, there is higher potential of encounters with animals like snakes and skunks. Does your plan account for that?

A: We will mow 10-12 foot swath of grass immediately adjacent to both sides of the sidewalk keeping a buffer zone between the paved walkways and the taller grass. The gulch is a high traffic location. Animals like these prefer quiet hiding spots. Any time you're out and about in nature, we encourage you to exercise awareness. We will monitor the conditions at the gulch and take necessary steps to ensure it is a safe place for those that use it.

Q: Will there be a higher risk of grass fire if the grass in the gulch is dry?

A: The irrigation system will remain in place. If we experience overly dry conditions, we have the option of watering it to reduce the risk of fire. The hillsides all along 4th Street are natural and unwatered native grasslands. Grass fires have not been an issue.

Q: If we experience a 100 or 500 year flood event, will the new plantings reduce the capability of the gulch to handle drainage?

A: The new landscape will not change the ability of the gulch to handle water. As part of the gulch project, we will be cleaning debris from the outfalls and removing the silt deposits that have accumulated. These things will help the gulch drain better than it does today.

Q: Have you considered the possibility of drilling a well or piping water from Capitol Lake rather than using city water to irrigate the gulch?

A: 14 million gallons (the average annual water usage from 2005-2014) is a lot of water usage no matter if it's treated city water, a well, or a pipeline from Capitol Lake. However, we have consulted experts at the State Engineer's office to address this suggestion. The first aquifer beneath the area is approximately 900-1000 feet below the surface. At this depth, it would cost around \$45,000 for each well and could require more than one well to supply the quantity of water needed. A well house would need to be erected at surface level which would be unsightly. A ventilation system to control methane gas would be necessary for worker safety. Buildings and Grounds costs would increase due to the addition of well maintenance expenses. The water is very poor quality and would likely have a sulfur odor similar to that of the memorial fountain. Also, DENR would need to evaluate the impact of flow into Capitol Lake if water in the Dakota Sandstone aquifer is redirected.

Trenching or horizontally boring a waterline from Capitol Lake to the gulch would be quite costly and cause a significant disruption to the lake. The water level of the lake would be substantially decreased if not completely depleted. It is probable that one would be sacrificed to save the other.

The Hilger's Gulch project is a planned and intentional relandscaping of the property. We encourage the community to be engaged via [Facebook](#) and to check for regular updates on the [State News](#) webpage.