

Section C

Current and Future Water Quality Initiatives

Chapter 1 - Current Water Quality Initiatives

1.1 Workshop Summaries

One workshop was held in the Savannah River basin in Sapphire on October 16, 2000. There were 32 people in attendance representing a wide variety of interests. Figure C-1 gives an estimation of groups/interests represented based on information recorded by participants on attendance sheets.

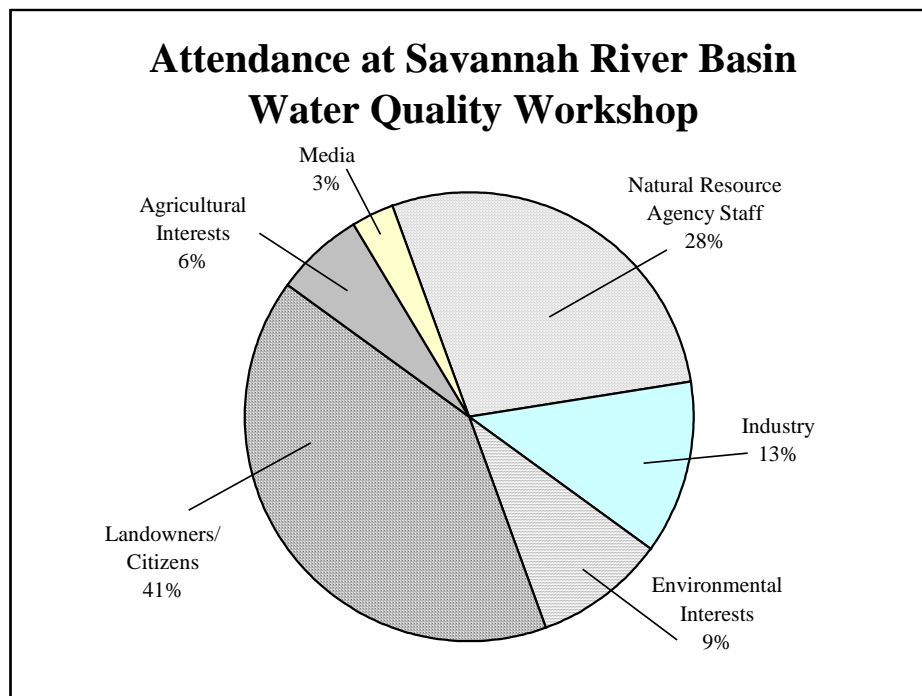


Figure C-1 Percent of Total Attendance by Various Interests at DWQ Water Quality Workshops in the Savannah River Basin (2000)

DWQ staff gave presentations about general water quality in the Savannah River basin, basinwide planning and the Wetlands Restoration Program. The watershed manager from South Carolina's Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC) also gave a brief presentation. Workshop attendees were asked to discuss the following questions in small groups:

1. What are the main threats to water quality in the Savannah River basin?
2. Where are the problem areas or waters?
3. What recommendations do you have for addressing these problems/waters?
4. What local agencies or organizations should be involved in addressing the problems?

Additionally, the Fairfield Sapphire Valley Master Association hosted a public forum designed to provide further input into the basinwide planning process on July 24, 2001. Approximately 50 people were in attendance and good discussion about water quality issues was generated.

Important Issues Basinwide

The most frequently cited threats to water quality identified by both workshop participants and people who attended the public forum were:

- Sedimentation (development and resulting from forest fires)
- Recreation impacts (wilderness camping, hiking)
- Lack of public education regarding impacts to water quality and regulations
- Lack of monitoring on smaller streams
- Impacts from the Cashiers WWTP

Appendix V summarizes all comments received through these workshops, as well as the public meeting and comment period that were held following the plan draft.

1.2 Federal Initiatives

1.2.1 Clean Water Act – Section 319 Program

Section 319 of the Clean Water Act provides grant money for nonpoint source demonstration projects. Approximately \$1 million is available annually for demonstration and education projects across the state. Project proposals are reviewed and selected by the North Carolina Nonpoint Source Workgroup, made up of state and federal agencies involved in regulation or research associated with nonpoint source pollution. Information on the North Carolina 319 Grant Program, including application deadlines and requests for proposals, are available online at <http://h2o.enr.state.nc.us/nps/bigpic.htm>.

There are no projects in the North Carolina portion of the Savannah River basin that have been funded (federal Section 319 money must be matched with nonfederal dollars) through the Section 319 program between 1990 and 2000.

1.3 State Initiatives

1.3.1 Clean Water Management Trust Fund

The Clean Water Management Trust Fund offers approximately \$40 million annually in grants for projects within the broadly focused areas of restoring and protecting state surface waters and establishing a network of riparian buffers and greenways. There are no projects in the North Carolina portion of the Savannah River basin that have been funded through the Clean Water Management Trust Fund as of May 2001. For more information on the CWMTF or these grants, call (252) 830-3222 or www.cwmtf.net.

1.3.2 NC Wetlands Restoration Program

The North Carolina Wetlands Restoration Program (NCWRP) is a nonregulatory program responsible for implementing wetland and stream restoration projects throughout the state. The major goal of the NCWRP is to restore or improve the vital functions provided by wetlands, streams and riparian buffer zones within the context of local watershed management and overall aquatic ecosystem health. These vital functions include water quality protection, erosion control, flood prevention, fisheries and wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities. The NCWRP is not a grant program. Instead, it funds wetland, stream and riparian zone projects directly through the Wetlands Restoration Fund.

Restoration sites are targeted through the development and use of Watershed Restoration Plans (formerly called "Basinwide Wetland and Riparian Restoration Plans"). These plans are developed, in part, using information compiled in DWQ's Basinwide Water Quality Plans and Basinwide Assessment Reports. The NCWRP Plans evaluate resource data and existing water quality initiatives within local watersheds in order to select "Targeted Local Watersheds". Targeted Local Watersheds are areas having the greatest need and opportunity for stream and wetlands restoration efforts and where NCWRP resources can be most efficiently focused for maximum restoration benefit. The NCWRP Watershed Restoration Plans are updated every five years, generally on the same timeline as DWQ's Basinwide Water Quality Plans.

Table C-1 lists the NCWRP's targeted Local Watersheds in the Savannah River basin. Other agencies, individuals and private groups are encouraged to target their search for restoration projects within these local watersheds.

Table C-1 Wetlands Restoration Program Targeted Local Watersheds (2001)

| Subbasin | Targeted Local Watershed Name(s) | Targeted Local Watershed Number(s)* |
|----------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 03-13-01 | Chattooga River | 10010 |
| 03-13-02 | Horsepasture River | 10020 |

* The numbers listed are the last five digits of the 14-digit Hydrologic Unit (HU) for each Local Watershed. The first nine digits for each watershed are 030601010.

The NCWRP can perform restoration projects cooperatively with other state or federal programs or environmental groups. For example, the NCWRP's efforts can complement projects funded through the Section 319 Nonpoint Source Program. Integrating wetlands and riparian restoration components with 319 funded and/or Clean Water Management Trust Fund projects will often optimize the overall water quality benefits within a given watershed.

The NCWRP actively seeks landowners [both public and private] within the Savannah River basin who have potentially restorable stream, wetland or riparian buffer sites. For more information about participating in the NCWRP, please contact Crystal Braswell at (919) 733-5208 or visit the website at <http://h2o.enr.state.nc.us/wrp/>.

1.3.3 SC Department of Health and Environmental Control

In 1991, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) Bureau implemented the Watershed Water Quality Management Strategy in order to more efficiently protect and improve the quality of South Carolina's surface water resources. This management strategy recognizes the interdependence of water quality and all the activities that occur in the associated drainage basin. Under the watershed management approach, monitoring, assessment, problem identification and prioritization, water quality modeling, planning, permitting and other DHEC initiatives are coordinated by basin. A watershed water quality assessment document is produced for each basin on a five-year rotating schedule. The first *Watershed Water Quality Management Strategy* for the Savannah River basin was published in 1993. The document was updated as the *Watershed Water Quality Assessment* for the Savannah and Salkehatchie River Basins in 1997. A second update is planned for 2002.

To obtain a copy of the *Watershed Water Quality Assessment* or for further information about water quality in the Savannah River basin in South Carolina, contact Richelle Tolton by calling (803) 898-4213 or by email toltonrd@columb32.dhec.state.sc.us. You may also visit the website at <http://www.scdhec.net/water>.

1.4 Regional Initiatives

1.4.1 Chattooga Conservancy, Inc.

The Chattooga Conservancy (CC) is a grassroots conservation organization that formed in late 1991, operating for the first few years through the efforts of a small group of volunteers. At that time, the conservancy submitted a plan to the US Forest Service that proposed managing the watershed's national forests as a coherent ecological unit regardless of political boundaries and which also described specific strategies for restoring the health of the river's ecosystem. By August of 1994, the conservancy was able to hire a small staff, and subsequently worked to develop a diverse array of programs promoting the organization's objectives in the watershed's tri-state area (North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia) and throughout the Southeast region. Programs include:

- Monitoring and oversight of all US Forest Service (USFS) activities in the 190,000-acre Chattooga River watershed as well as management proposals for public lands contiguous with this watershed. Monitoring also includes conducting proactive, scientifically defensible field inventories of the watershed's natural resources.
- The Chattooga Conservation Plan, which is the culmination of several years work and is the first, specific landscape-level management plan designed for an area in the Southern Appalachians. The plan's basic zoning was determined through modeling and analyses of 21 layers of data utilizing Geographic Information Systems technology. Publication of the plan's text and color poster was timed to influence USFS plan revisions in the southern region and is also being used to advance all program objectives. Immediate goals are to have the Chattooga Conservation Plan included as a viable alternative in the watershed's new Forest Plans (for the national forests), while networking to facilitate the creation of contiguous, scientifically and economically credible conservation plans across the Southeast.

- Cooperative projects with the USFS including a proposal to work together to reforest a 400-acre tract of cleared land with native hardwoods and an experimental effort to establish American chestnut trees. Chattooga Conservancy also works to facilitate acquisition of tracts of land from willing sellers for the watershed's national forest system and to promote full restoration of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.
- Two horse-logging projects - the most recent one involved logging a small timber sale on the Nantahala National Forest, sawing the timber on-site with a portable bandsaw, and selling the dimensional lumber in the local community.
- The *Chattooga Quarterly*, a news magazine that is designed to educate citizens about timely conservation issues and local history and to focus and heighten awareness while promoting activism.
- Community outreach and education via public meetings, speaking engagements, action alerts, educational workshops/demonstrations, and events which generate media opportunities.

For further information about the Chattooga Conservancy, contact Executive Director, Buzz Williams, by calling 706-782-6097, by email crwc@rabun.net or by visiting the website at <http://www.chattoogariver.com/>.

1.4.2 The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy, an international private non-profit organization, works with members, contributors and partners to acquire conservation land. The North Carolina Chapter of The Nature Conservancy has helped to protect 72,000 acres across the state. Some of the land is owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy, and other sites are acquired on behalf of state and federal conservation agencies to be placed in public ownership.

The NC Chapter works in conjunction with the NC Natural Heritage Program to identify and inventory unique natural areas and habitats. The NC Chapter establishes protection priorities based on information gathered by the Heritage Program.

In the Savannah River basin, The Nature Conservancy worked to acquire and protect the Jocassee Gorges with many conservation organizations and agencies including the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, US Forest Service and the Sierra Club. The State of North Carolina appropriated \$5 million for the property, and in 1999, the state purchased approximately 9,750 acres from Duke Energy. The Division of Parks and Recreation manages 7,137 acres in a state park, while the NC Wildlife Resources Commission manages 2,613 acres as a game land. In addition, the US Forest Service plans to acquire about 2,000 acres in the Thompson River Gorge.

Currently, The Nature Conservancy does not have active projects in the Savannah River basin. If you would like information about past protection efforts, contact Mountains District Coordinator, Beth Bockoven, by calling (828) 749-1700 or by email bbockoven@tnc.org.

1.5 Local Initiatives

1.5.1 Jackson County Erosion & Sediment Control Ordinance

In November 2000, Jackson County implemented a locally delegated erosion and sediment control program. Like the statewide program administered by the Division of Land Resources, the county requires an erosion and sediment control plan for development activities disturbing more than one acre of land. The county attempts to inspect all projects weekly. Land-disturbing activities that occur on sites less than one acre in size are inspected only when a complaint is received. For more information about Jackson County's program, contact Erosion Control Officer, Jeff McCall, by calling (828) 586-7560.

1.5.2 Jackson Macon Conservation Alliance

The Chattooga Conservancy has been helping citizens in the Highlands and Cashiers communities establish the Jackson Macon Conservation Alliance (JMCA). The JMCA coalesced from a bitter water quality dispute that recently led to a landmark ruling in NC, where an administrative judge gave priority to measurable units of turbidity instead of the implementation of voluntary best management practices in cases involving erosion control, mitigation and enforcement. The judge's decision has set the stage for rewriting state sedimentation laws, oversight of which is foremost on the JMCA's actions. The organization has also endorsed the designation of the Cullasaja River as a state Natural and Scenic River; such a designation could result in greater scrutiny of actions that would impact the river. In addition, the JMCA has endorsed a moratorium on expanding the Cashiers WWTP (which discharges its effluent into the headwaters of the Chattooga River) until more information is gathered about the plant's compliance with its NPDES permit, and the ability of the WWTP's receiving waters to handle an increase in treated effluent without causing further degradation.