

Gills Creek Watershed Association

Strategic Plan Executive Summary December 2010



Gills Creek Watershed Association
712 Main St., EWS 603
Columbia, SC 29208
803-727-8326
www.gillscreekwatershed.org

The mission of the Gills Creek Watershed Association is to restore and protect the Gills Creek watershed by uniting citizens, government, organizations, and business

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Gills Creek Watershed Association (GCWA) was originally formed in the late 1990s by a group of citizens that noticed a decline in water quality in the Lake Katharine area. With the support of Richland County, in 2006-07 the GCWA reformed with a major focus on comprehensive watershed management. Since 2007, the GCWA has been working to improve its organizational structure, create a strong and dedicated membership base, implement stream and lake restoration projects, and advocate for policy changes to improve water quality. The GCWA had a number of major milestones in 2009 including electing its first official board of directors, initiating a membership program, and holding its first fundraiser event. Additionally, GCWA has worked to engage citizens and residents in the watershed on how to best protect and restore Gills Creek.

As part of its initial organization efforts, a Vision Statement was adopted by the Board in 2007 to project the aspirations for the Association:

By 2018 the Gills Creek watershed will be a national model for watershed management and planning. Citizens are enjoying the bike and walking trails throughout the watershed and it serves as the basis for an environmental education curriculum for Richland County Schools. All new development is carefully studied for its impact on the watershed and many of the mistakes of the past have been corrected. The stream corridors have received special attention, accommodate diverse wildlife and natural flows and capacities have been restored. Water quality is much improved and best management practices are working. An example is that there has been no net loss of pervious surfaces, in fact, there has been a measurable reduction in impervious surfaces in the past 3 years. Current codes reflect strong support from the public and encourage “green” development. The watershed is litter-free and sedimentation in the lakes has been drastically reduced. A task force composed of governmental representatives and citizens is a model for a coordinated approach to planning, regulation and development in an environmentally sensitive area.

To guide the course of the Association in achieving its vision, a strategic planning initiative was made in 2007 under the auspices of the Clemson Institute for Community Economic Development. By late 2009, the Board determined that an updated Strategic Plan would be in order, as most of the goals and objectives of the first plan had been achieved. A Planning Committee was formed and began meeting in January 2010. Diana Toledo of the River Network provided facilitation of this work, including a Board retreat held in June 2010. The Plan was presented to the Board and officially adopted in December 2010.

The Planning Committee began by interviewing 16 stakeholders who had diverse experience in working with the GCWA. From these interviews, a list of critical issues was developed to focus the assessment of the current effectiveness and future orientation of the Association. These issues then served as the 'fodder' for the Board retreat, which provided a general Board consensus on a set of Goals for the Association to concentrate its work in the next few years. Following the retreat, the Planning Committee then generated this Plan of more detailed Objectives and Activities associated with them. Interim versions of the Plan were reviewed and revised by individual Committee Chairs as appropriate.

An initial set of five goals emerged to address the work GCWA should undertake to advance its mission. Two additional goals were articulated to deal with internal organizational issues. As it developed, the goals had a good fit within the existing Committee structure, with little need to re-organize at that level. The Plan attempts to map out how these Committees can work most effectively and efficiently as a young organization with limited resources.

The committee structure is as follows:

Executive Committee: oversight of all Board and Association functions, and special focus on the organizational issues promoting a stable and competent Association.

Membership Committee: point of initial contact for residents, groups, and jurisdictions interested in GCWA.

Education Committee: promotion of targeted, in-depth educational functions for GCWA constituencies, and coordination of GCWA public events.

Technical Committee: continuing the analysis begun with the GCWA Management Plan to identify and prioritize restoration projects in the watershed.

Financial Stewardship Committee: oversight of the Association's financial management and reporting, and coordination of fundraising strategies.

The Goals for this Strategic Plan are as follows:

Goal #1: Improve water quality, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities in the Gills Creek watershed by promoting and implementing restoration projects that engage and benefit the community.

Oversight: Technical Committee (unless otherwise noted)

Goal #2: Inform and educate decision-makers and stakeholders in the watershed about the importance of effective watershed management and actions they can take to protect and restore the Gills Creek watershed.

Oversight: Education and Outreach Committee

Goal #3: Serve as a respected advocate for stormwater management and land use practices that will improve water quality in the Gills Creek Watershed.

Oversight: Staff with Board of Directors

Goal #4: Increase GCWA membership on a sustained basis and engage members and the larger community in GCWA's mission and programs.

Oversight: Membership Committee

Goal #5: Develop a financial management system and a sustainable fundraising strategy to support GCWA programs and staff and to implement this strategic plan.

Oversight: Financial Stewardship Committee

Goal #6: Develop strong and active committees that implement GCWA programs, engage the community, and develop GCWA future leadership

Oversight: Executive Committee with Coordinator

Goal #7 Develop GCWA Board of Directors to include a number of strong leaders and a membership that understands and fulfills its roles and responsibilities as Directors.

Oversight: Executive Committee with Coordinator

The following pages present the Strategic Plan in detail with proposed timelines. It is anticipated that it will form the core of each Committee's work plan for the months and years ahead.