



**GILLS CREEK  
WATERSHED  
ASSOCIATION**

*Uniting for Clean Water*  
[www.gillscreekwatershed.org](http://www.gillscreekwatershed.org)

**2014-2015 ANNUAL REPORT**



**Cover**

Looking east from Lower Rockyford Lake to Upper Rockyford Lake with I-77 in the distance.

***This two-page spread***

Upper end of Cary Lake with the water level lowered shows the re-sedimentation of the lake since a dredging project completed in 2011. The sediment comes from Decker Boulevard north along Jackson and Little Jackson Creeks which run from northeast Columbia. GCWA is working with Richland County on a source reduction project on Little Jackson Creek.

*Photos by Elliott Powell, 2014.*

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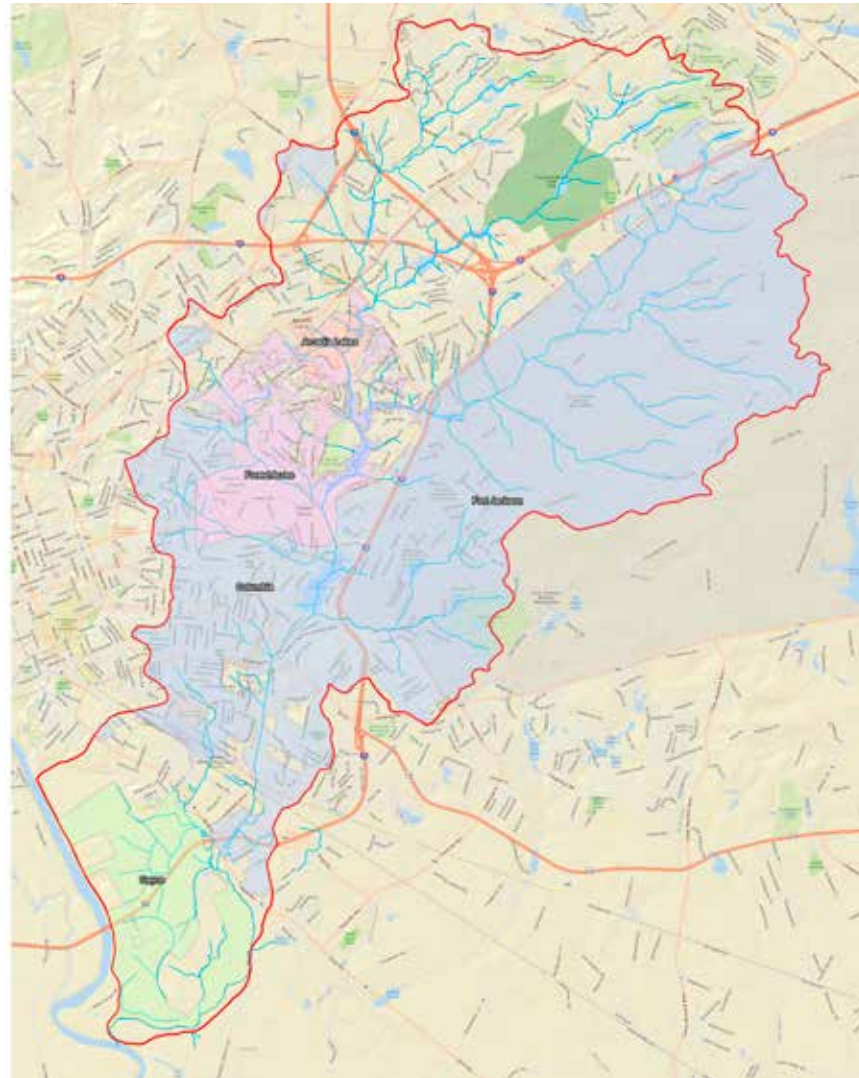
# THE GILLS CREEK WATERSHED ANNUAL REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR JULY 1, 2014 TO JUNE 30, 2015

The area of the Gills Creek Watershed is 76 square miles. It contains approximately 70 miles of streams, over 47,000 acres of land, and over 100 impoundments totaling 944 acres. The primary named tributaries of the watershed from east to west are Gills Creek, Jackson Creek and Little Jackson Creek. All three tributaries are impounded multiple times to create over a dozen lakes from Centennial Lake to Lake Katharine.

Downstream of Lake Katharine, Gills Creek flows freely through a variety of residential, agricultural, and commercial land uses until its confluence with the Congaree River south of I-77.

Over 140,000 people reside in the Watershed which stretches across the Town of Arcadia Lakes, City of Forest Acres, the City of Columbia, Fort Jackson, the City of Cayce, and unincorporated Richland County. Each of these jurisdictions has their own land use policies, including plans for growth, zoning regulations, development standards, and sediment and erosion control regulations. A primary goal of the GCWA is to bring together the different jurisdictions in the watershed to restore and protect the watershed through implementation of the management plan, coordinated stormwater regulations, and cooperative restoration projects.

The GCWA was originally formed in the late 1990's by a group of citizens that noticed a decline in water quality in the Lake Katharine area. In the late 1999, The GCWA became a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. In 2006, Richland County conducted public out-reach meetings in response to pressure from DHEC to do something about the poor water quality in the watershed. With the support of Richland County, in 2006-07 the GCWA re-formed with a major focus on comprehensive watershed management. Since 2007, the GCWA has been working to improve our 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 Gills Creek Watershed Association Strategic Plan was completed July 2007. The Gills Creek Watershed Management Plan in was completed in May 2009. Since that time, we have been working implement those plans, and to engage citizens, government, organizations, and businesses in the watershed on how to best protect, restore and manage the watershed to make it an asset to the community.



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The past fiscal year has been one of growth and planning for the Gills Creek Watershed Association. Our membership saw a rise of over 30 percent, increasing from about 250 to 330, and we exceeded our 2014-15 fundraising goals. We received county, state, and federal grants to work towards our goals of researching and improving water quality, and educating the public about the Gills Creek watershed. To guide us in our vision, we updated our strategic plan this year.

Equally important, if not more so, we have continued to partner with all the municipalities in our watershed, as well as a wide variety of agencies, private businesses, local organizations, and an army of volunteers to work towards greater awareness of the challenges faced by our compromised urban drainage, and to move towards its improved health. We are deeply grateful to all of our supporters.

Finally, we are proud to announce that our board voted to support a change of title for our staff member Erich Miarka. Erich has grown in expertise and matured into an adept leader. As of October of 2015, Erich becomes our Executive Director. This is both a concrete and symbolic step forward for our organization.

Many challenges await us in the coming year. It is our hope that we can continue to build our support base and bring together the entire community. Together we can make great strides towards a watershed with clear creeks and lakes, strong dams, carefully managed stormwater, and greenway buffers that mitigate flooding and provide recreational corridors.

Valerie Marcil



## PROGRAM COORDINATOR'S MESSAGE

Another successful year has passed us by and the future looks even brighter. Last year we reached major goals and milestones ranging from fundraising to membership to grant awards. Next year we will begin implementing some of the plans we have been working so tirelessly on for the past few years. It is an exciting time for Gills Creek Watershed and our Association!

Citizens are beginning to realize the value Gills Creek offers to our community. With some more attention and resources, Gills Creek can become a true asset once again. The Richland County Transportation Penny Sales Tax program has afforded us a tremendous opportunity. Five of the proposed greenway trail projects are located in Gills Creek Watershed with a few along the creek itself. By getting people near Gills Creek while recreating we can instill a sense of pride and ownership in this natural resource.

Watershed restoration and protection is a long, uphill battle but we are fortunate to have great partners in Richland County, the City of Columbia, the City of Forest Acres, and the Town of Arcadia Lakes. The Association and our partners are dealing with decades of mismanagement and neglect. Unfortunately the solution will not come to us overnight. It takes the combined efforts of the Association, local governments, business, and citizens to make a positive, lasting change. We can and will continue these efforts and appreciate the support of all of our members, sponsors, and donors that make our work possible.

Erich Miarka



**Education Committee**

- GCWA representatives participated in 9 community events with thousands of people in attendance and provided educational information about the watershed, an interactive Enviroscope watershed model, information about sources of major pollutants which impact water quality, and how people can become more involved.
- GCWA representative spoke at 20 meetings including neighborhood and homeowner associations, civic groups, church groups, and conferences. Over 910 people attended these meetings.
- The GCWA sent monthly e-newsletters to approximately 700 people. E-newsletters include information about current and upcoming events, education on stormwater, and acknowledgment of projects and/or volunteers. A newsletter has been sent each month of this fiscal year. The newsletters are on our website at [www.gillscreekwatershed.org](http://www.gillscreekwatershed.org).
- The GCWA participated in and organized a variety of clean-ups focused on trash and debris removal. 7 clean-up events were led by GCWA throughout the watershed during FY 2014-15 including lake cleanups, road cleanups (near the Creek), and invasive plant species removals. 82 bags of trash and 40 bags of recycling were removed using entirely GCWA volunteers. An invasive plant species removal workday was held at Owens Field Park and volunteers were able to clear invasive privet from a large portion of the forested area of the park. Many more cleanups were held in Gills Creek Watershed through Keep the Midlands Beautiful. GCWA seeks out organizations/associations to adopt sections of Gills Creek through Keep the Midlands Beautiful.
- The GCWA held its first ever “Lake Summit” to educate lake and pond owners of Gills Creek Watershed on how they can better protect their water resource and help improve the Watershed. Topics ranged from aquatic weed management to pertinent laws and dam safety requirements.
- The GCWA organized and hosted a presentation from local historian Warner Montgomery on the history of the Gills Creek Watershed. This presentation focused on some of the water quality impairments today and how Gills Creek Watershed has gotten to this point.



*Ann Yancey explaining watersheds using the Enviroscope at the Summer Celebration of Water.*



*Adopt A Highway cleanups in cooperation with Heathwood Hall are conducted 4 times a year on South Beltline.*



*Photo (courtesy of Fort Jackson) featured in Warner Montgomery’s book on Forest Acres which shows the channeling that occurred when Camp Jackson was built was part of the library lecture series.*



*Little Sugar Creek Greenway fact-finding field trip with representatives of the city and county to understand Charlotte’s process for stream restoration and building a greenway.*



*The fifth annual Wine For Water fundraiser excellent food from local restaurants and a silent auction with items donated by local businesses and the community.*



*Urban Paddle on Cary Lake attracted a crowd of young and old for paddling and picnicking.*

- Organized and led a field trip for local elected officials and key city and county staff to Little Sugar Creek in Charlotte, NC. This field trip focused on a major urban stream restoration project and an adjacent greenway; very similar to plans for Gills Creek.

**Membership Committee**

- Growing the membership base to 330 members, the highest membership count since GCWA’s inception. Organizational members include the Cary Lake Homeowner’s Association, Lake Katharine Homeowner’s Association, and Spring Lake Homeowner’s Association.
- Organized and held the fifth annual Wine for Water fundraiser event. This year’s Wine for Water brought in 325 attendees and raised \$11,500 for the Association. This year GCWA partnered with Rocky Branch Watershed Alliance and Smith Branch Watershed Alliance for Wine for Water to grow the fundraising potential and strengthen organizational partnerships.
- Conducted the “Urban Paddle” on Cary Lake in Gills Creek Watershed. The point of the event was to strengthen membership base and show citizens the potential Gills Creek has as a recreational asset. The event also educated citizens on some of the current impairments and threats of Gills Creek.
- Produced a Gills Creek calendar distributed them for free to over 100 citizens of Gills Creek Watershed. This calendar shows citizens that Gills Creek, its lakes, and tributaries have potential to be a community asset and should be treated as such.

**Financial Stewardship Committee**

- Advocated for and received funding for continuation of facilitation services for GCWA
- Developed an annual budget and fundraising plan
- Exceeded the FY 2014-15 fundraising goal of \$23,000

**Technical Committee**

- Reviewed the technical aspects of stormwater projects of Richland County and the City of Columbia including the Owens Field Taxiway Extension, Devil’s Ditch Project, the Little Jackson Creek Mitigation Project, and Owens Field Park BMP and Education Project

- Worked with the City of Forest Acres and Richland County to review and establish a buffer ordinance for Forest Acres
- Investigated formal complaints/concerns from citizens regarding potential violations of stormwater regulations
- Provided input to Richland School District 2 for a proposed new elementary school in an environmentally sensitive area of the watershed
- Reviewed and commented on a proposed development on Orphanage Branch in Forest Acres which threatened to further degrade Orphanage Branch, Pen Branch, and Lake Katharine. The originally proposed development was canceled thanks in large part to the issues raised by Gills Creek Watershed Association.
- Completed a finalized draft of a “Private Pond Maintenance Policy” which will be presented to Richland County Council. The intent of this policy is to rank and prioritize potential lake restoration projects based on the amount of public benefit they provide, including pollutant uptake/removal.

**Special Projects:**

*Middle Watershed Master Plan*

Beginning in 2012 with a grant from the Richland County Conservation Commission, the GCWA was able to hire a consulting team to design a Master Plan of the portion of Gills Creek extending from Kilbourne Road south to Shop Road. This plan details opportunities for a greenway, stream restoration, kayak canoe launches, and stormwater best management practices (BMP) along Gills Creek. The project is a Richland County Transportation Penny Tax project, and GCWA is now working with the City of Columbia to formalize an ownership and maintenance agreement for the greenway once it is completed. GCWA is also working with property owners in the project area to secure easements for the greenway.

*Owens Field Park BMP and Education Project*

The GCWA, working in coordination with Richland County, applied for and was awarded a 319 nonpoint source pollution reduction grant from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. Grant funds are being used to construct three bioretention cells at Owens Field Park that



Severe erosion on Pen Branch was remedied with an emergency grant. The Forest Acres buffer ordinance will prevent this in future developments.



GCWA worked with Forest Acres and concerned residents to reduce the impact of a controversial Forest Acres development



Middle Watershed project rendering of the Crowson Road area of a greenway which is being funded by the Richland County Transportation Penny Tax.



Owens Field Park BMP construction and education project will install structures to reduce stormwater run-off and provide informational kiosks as part of the park's upgrade.



Cross Hill Market educational kiosk which describes the mechanism of rain gardens and retention structures in controlling stormwater run-off.



Educational kiosk at Sesquicentennial State Park explains the watershed concept to visitors.

will capture and infiltrate stormwater before entering Devil's Ditch and Gills Creek. The design of stormwater BMPs was completed by firm Fuss and O'Neill and is currently going through the permitting process before it goes out to bid for construction.

*Environmental Education Kiosks*

In FY 2014-15 the GCWA received a grant from the Richland County Conservation Commission to design and install two watershed/water quality education signs in Gills Creek Watershed. These kiosks were located at key locations in the watershed and were designed for the general public to educate them about Gills Creek Watershed, its impairments, and BMPs that can help improve water quality. These kiosks are located at Sesquicentennial State Park and the Cross Hill Market in Columbia, SC.

*Devil's Ditch and Little Jackson Creek Mitigation*

Because of a taxiway extension at Hamilton-Owens Airport over 700 linear feet of Devil's Ditch must be buried in a culvert. GCWA worked with Richland County Stormwater, the Airport Commission, and the consulting firm working on the project to identify potential mitigation sites. A site along Little Jackson Creek in the upper portion of Gills Creek Watershed was selected as the mitigation site. GCWA fully supported this project and recommended it to the Army Corps of Engineers. Planning and design is currently underway for this project.

*City of Columbia Consent Decree and Supplemental Environmental Project*

The GCWA helped structure the Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) portion of the EPA/City of Columbia consent decree. A portion of SEP funds will be used for on-the-ground restoration projects and stormwater BMPs along Gills Creek. During FY 2014-15, GCWA staff and volunteers served on the selection committee to select the design and construction firm to complete the SEP projects. GCWA has been working closely with the selected firm, Kleinschmidt Associates, in the planning and design phase of the project.

*EPA Environmental Justice Small Grant*

In FY 2014-15 GCWA applied for an EPA Environmental Justice Small Grant to conduct a fish survey and mercury assessment in the lower portion of the Gills Creek Watershed. This area is commonly

fished by nearby residents – a traditionally underserved community. It is known that many of these fishers consume their catch. No thorough mercury risk assessment has been done in this portion of the watershed so the exact level of mercury in these fish is unknown. This grant will discover what the exact level of mercury in fish tissue is and communicate those results to the affected community.

**Organizational Capacity**

The strengths of the GCWA include sustained leadership and partners, an active membership, and growing interest by the general public to improve water quality. Weaknesses include a need for new leadership, a lack of diverse funding sources, and the scarcity of on-the-ground restoration projects to show tangible progress in our mission.

The GCWA is addressing the issues of board leadership and fundraising with a new president, vice-president, a transition plan, and a renewed Board commitment to active fundraising efforts. In addition, a revised 3-year Strategic Plan was adopted.

With regard to the need for tangible results, this is not a specific weakness unique to GCWA, but rather a function of the general mission. It takes years of planning to build consensus and marshal the resources required to implement significant watershed restoration. Our challenge is to maintain a sense of momentum and vision among our constituencies along the way

Regular organizational activities include the following meetings:

**Executive Committee Meetings**

Executive Committee meetings are usually held the first Thursday of every month. Many of the decisions of the organization take place at the Executive Committee level.

**Board Meetings**

Board meetings are usually held on the second Thursday of every month. During FY 14-15, a meeting took place each month except July. Open to the public.

**Technical Committee Meetings**

Technical Committee meetings are usually held the second Wednesday of every month. Open to the public.

**Education Committee Meetings**

Education Committee meetings are usually held the first Tuesday of every month. Open to the public.



The "upditch" above Entrance Lake in Spring Valley showing the severe erosion that will be improved by the Little Jackson Creek Mitigation project.



Gills Creek Watershed Board of Directors meetings are usually held monthly at Jim Hamilton - Owens Field. The public is welcome to attend.

**2014-15 Board, Staff & Partners**

**Board of Directors**

- |  |  |               |
|--|--|---------------|
| Valerie Marcil, <i>President</i>             | Tameria Warren, <i>Education Committee Chair</i> | Carol Kososki |
| Alicia de Myhrer, <i>Vice President</i>      | Thom Bristol                                     | Pete Mayers   |
| Sam Agee, <i>Secretary</i>                   | Michael Criss                                    | Julie Mayson  |
| Dan Tufford, <i>Treasurer</i>                | Emily Freeman Jones                              | Mary McIntosh |
| Lewis Kirk, <i>Technical Committee Chair</i> | D. Michael Kelly                                 | Judy Timmons  |
| Sam Agee, <i>Membership Committee Chair</i>  |  | Mark Watson   |

**Staff**

Erich Miarka, *Program Coordinator*

**Advisory Board Members**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Mary Cafilisch, <i>Carolina Clear, Clemson University Extension Services</i> | Carol Roberts, <i>SCDHEC Saluda &amp; Catawba Watershed Manager</i> |
| Quinton Epps, <i>Richland County Stormwater Division</i>                     | Amy Overstreet, <i>USDA NRCS</i>                                    |
| Victoria Kramer, <i>City of Columbia Engineering Department</i>              | Nancy Stone-Collum, <i>Richland County Conservation Commission</i>  |
| Tracy Mitchell, <i>City of Columbia Stormwater Manager</i>                   | Mullen Taylor, <i>Mullen Taylor, LLC</i>                            |
| Jim Manning, <i>Richland County Council</i>                                  |   |

**Partner Organizations**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Richland County                                      | Intertape Polymer Group                              |
| City of Columbia                                     | City of Columbia Climate Protection Action Committee |
| City of Forest Acres                                 | Congaree Riverkeeper                                 |
| Town of Arcadia Lakes                                | Rocky Branch Watershed Alliance                      |
| Richland County Stormwater Consortium/Carolina Clear | River Network  |
| Richland County Conservation Commission              | American Rivers                                      |
| Keep the Midlands Beautiful                          |  |

**Sponsors**

- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| Aetna Foundation Matching Grant - c.o. John and Carol Kososki | Gay Gardeners Garden Club    |
| BB&T  | LS3P                         |
| Cary Lake HOA   | Thompson Construction Group  |
| EDENS   | Town and Country Garden Club |
|   | WK Dickson                   |

Sponsorship is available at four levels: Champion (\$5000+), Leadership (\$1000), Sponsor (\$500), and Friend (\$250).

**Organizational Members**

Cary Lake HOA (46 residents) Lake Katharine HOA (86 residents)  
 The Gills Creek Watershed Association offers homeowners associations and other organizations in the watershed the option to join for all their members. Organizational members join as a single entity using organizational funds. All members of the organization receive full benefits of membership in the GCWA minus membership gifts.

Hamilton, McKinney & Moss, Certified Public Accountants, conducted an audit of the Association for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2015. It was presented to the Board of Directors in November. Financial documents are available to be viewed by request.

## Donors

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Steve Brown  
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Elmer Whitten  
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Wade Wolverton  
Shawn Woodard  
Douglas & Diane Woodbrown  
Ed Wrightson

## The Gills Creek Watershed Association

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[www.gillscreekwatershed.org](http://www.gillscreekwatershed.org)