

2019-2020

ANNUAL REPORT



**GILLS CREEK WATERSHED
ASSOCIATION**

Our 2019-2020 year seemed normal enough....right up until December when our then-Executive Director Eric Goff got an offer to be a professor that was too good to refuse. Mary Virginia Tynan, our fabulous Outreach Coordinator, and Board members again stepped up to keep the organization on an even keel. We were very, very fortunate to attract Carmony Adler as our new Executive Director, and just when it looked like we might slip back to "normal," the pandemic forced numerous changes in how we deal with each other, and with you, our members. I have been so proud of the staff and the Board, and so grateful for the response of members and friends as we've worked through the many challenges we've faced.

During this unusual time, we've launched an online learning series, with webinars focused on topics ranging from recycling to an examination of critters living under rocks in the water. We are working on several potential land protection projects, and we are continuing to monitor water quality, educate the public, and keep the watershed clean (and we thank you for your help!) Perhaps most importantly, we continue to advocate for long-term changes in public policy that will offer more protection against flooding, poor water quality, and unsightly waterbodies.

Thank you for all you do to make a difference.



I have heaps of gratitude for Trish, Mary Virginia, the Board, and all of you as members for making the start of my job with GCWA during the pandemic as easy and seamless as I can imagine. Slowly, I have been able to meet several of you in person, with masks and ample social distancing, and I look forward to meeting each and every one of you as these times allow.

I am excited to share that despite the pandemic, much progress has been made to protect and restore Gills Creek Watershed, to educate our community, and to advocate for sound land development and stormwater management practices to reduce flooding impacts and support cleaner water. Our work could not have been done without you. You have participated in our webinars, you have continued to safely do cleanups in our Watershed and monitor the Creek's water quality, and you have supported our larger on-the-ground protection and restoration projects.

Unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures, and we will continue to take the best path forward for Gills Creek and the Watershed that we call home, to bring our vision of all that it can be to life. I am honored to be in the position to lead this work. Thank you for your support and all you bring to GCWA.



TRISH JERMAN

Board President



CARMONY ADLER

Executive Director

GILLS CREEK WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

At Gills Creek Watershed Association, we are working to protect and restore Gills Creek.

OUR VISION

A vibrant, restored Gills Creek that is protected, valued, and enjoyed by its watershed communities.

OUR MISSION

The Gills Creek Watershed Association works to restore Gills Creek, educate the communities within its watershed, and advocate for the protection and preservation of the Creek's resources, beauty, and environmental sustainability.

Gills Creek is a true treasure. Its floodplains have the potential to reduce flooding impacts, it provides valuable wildlife habitat, and it enhances the quality of life in our community. We envision Gills Creek continuing to provide these benefits, as well as an enhanced, accessible green space for all to witness and enjoy its underappreciated beauty and learn about its myriad benefits to the greater community.

Gills Creek is among the largest impaired urban watersheds in South Carolina, with a number of water quality problems including high bacteria levels, low dissolved oxygen, litter, and sedimentation, along with high flood risks. Yet nearly 111,000 community members call the Gills Creek Watershed home, using Gills Creek for recreational purposes and subsistence fishing. The Watershed consists of sections of Richland County, the City of Columbia, the City of Cayce, the City of Forest Acres, the Town of Arcadia Lakes, and Fort Jackson. That's why our work is so important. Supporting Gills Creek Watershed Association is supporting your community.

We know if we can enhance Gills Creek's ability to provide safe and clean recreational opportunities, habitat for plants and wildlife, and natural flood protection, we can also foster a healthier, safer, and more connected community. Gills Creek Watershed Association envisions a vibrant, restored Gills Creek that is protected, valued, and enjoyed by all of its watershed communities.



**2019-2020
MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS**



RESTORATION AND PROTECTION PROJECTS

GCWA initiated protection projects for water quality improvement and flood hazard reduction, including:

- the development of a plan for a new greenspace along Gills Creek in Forest Acres
- an evaluation of Pine Tree Lake's potential to absorb floodwaters and provide wetland habitat
- a plan for an "Urban Oasis" along Gills Creek to create an urban linear park connecting and preserving Gills Creek from Rosewood Dr. to the Congaree River
- the beginning of discussions with the County for reforestation and invasives removal on FEMA buyout properties along Timberlane Road and Decker Boulevard



NEW EDUCATION AND OUTREACH PLATFORM

GCWA launched a new education/outreach platform using webinars and suggested outdoor activities during the pandemic, creating new partnerships and connecting others beyond the Watershed boundaries.



ADVOCATE

GCWA advocated for floodplain preservation, water quality improvement, and sound stormwater management through public stances on development projects and analysis/comments on County and City government initiatives.





MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

GCWA updated the Gills Creek Watershed Management Plan to reflect changes in the Watershed's condition, provide a more explicit listing of projects along with predicted costs and expected results, and receive public input on pollutant "hotspots," helping to guide many of the specific projects within this Plan. Supported by Richland County Conservation Commission funds, this update will now allow any entity to apply for EPA 319 funds to improve water quality in the Watershed.



DESPITE THE PANDEMIC

GCWA continued important work despite restrictions imposed by the pandemic.



GCWA DEPENDS ON VOLUNTEERS LIKE YOU

Thank you!



LOOKING FORWARD

RESTORE

CROWSON ROAD PROJECT

GCWA will complete the Gills Creek Stream and Riparian Buffer Restoration project along Crowson Road in conjunction with the City of Columbia.

JACKSON CREEK RESTORATION

GCWA will continue to work with Richland County on the Jackson Creek Restoration Project at the old Zorba's site.

REFORESTATION

GCWA will work with Richland County to design and execute a reforestation plan and invasives removal for FEMA-buyout properties along Timberlane Road.

"URBAN OASIS"

GCWA will build on the reforestation effort to continue seeking support for an expanded Gills Creek "Urban Oasis" of protected floodplain property along the Creek.

WATER QUALITY SAMPLING

GCWA will expand its water quality sampling program to more effectively identify problems, using new equipment purchased with funds from a Richland County Conservation Commission grant.

ENHANCE FLOOD CONTROL

GCWA will investigate the possibility of joining with others to enhance flood control capacity and water quality by ensuring that Pine Tree Lake remains in its current condition.

LOOKING FORWARD

EDUCATE

EDUCATIONAL KIOSKS

GCWA will install the first of an anticipated series of educational kiosks along Gills Creek, with funding from a Richland County Conservation Commission grant, explaining the importance of stormwater management, floodplain management, and habitat protection.

WEBINARS

GCWA will continue to offer new educational webinars on a variety of topics relevant to stormwater, protection of water quality, and quality of life, both in the Watershed and nearby areas.

VIRTUAL TOUR

GCWA will continue to work with UofSC interns, to develop virtual historical tours of the Watershed.

WATERSHED ORAL HISTORY

GCWA will continue to work with Holly Floyd, a UofSC Masters student, to complete an oral history video and webpage collection to highlight "Voices of the Watershed," sharing recollections of growing up in the Watershed paired with visions of what the Watershed can become. The video will be part of the Smithsonian Water/Ways exhibit at Congaree National Park from November 2020-January 2021.

NATIVES VS INVASIVES

GCWA will spread awareness of invasive plant species along with native alternatives through educational pamphlets, outreach, and our website.

SUBSISTENCE FISHERS

GCWA will create new partnerships to increase education and outreach to subsistence fishers.

LOOKING FORWARD

ADVOCATE

GREENWAY

GCWA will work with the County and the City to move creation of the Gills Creek Greenway A forward.

POLICIES

GCWA will support strengthening development policies in both the County and the City in order to prevent future degradation of the Creek.

COMMUNICATIONS

GCWA will open new lines of communication to enhance our understanding of issues facing overburdened communities within the Watershed, in order to create new partnerships and better serve these communities.

OTHER

GCWA will set up better tracking mechanisms to help ensure there is balanced activity across the Watershed, as well as across all three of our mandates to Restore, Educate, and Advocate.

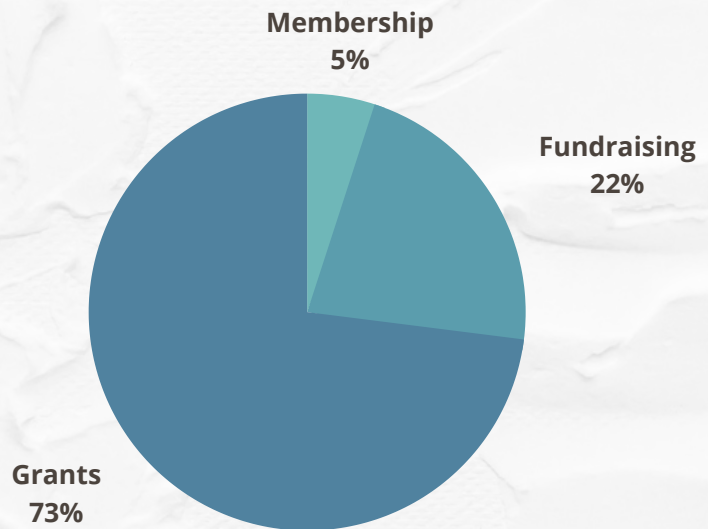
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Total income for the past fiscal year was \$138,669.00. The largest source was government grants, specifically directed towards Gills Creek enhancement and education efforts. Fundraising from events, sponsors, and donors was the second largest source.

Total expenses for the past fiscal year were \$121,651.45. The largest item was Program and Grant expenses, which include restricted funds from grants and some additional nonrestricted funds used for program and project activities. The second largest expenditure was part-time contract assistance, for accounting, organizing events, and running the organization.

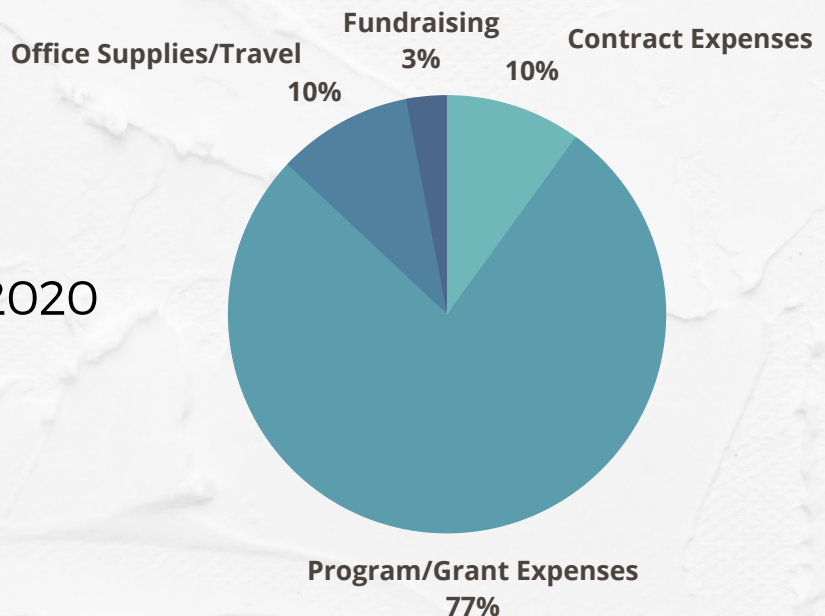
INCOME FISCAL YEAR 2019-2020

\$138,669.00



EXPENSES FISCAL YEAR 2019-2020

\$121,651.45



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Valerie Marcil and Henry Nechemias

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