

GILLS CREEK WATERSHED ASSOCIATION



ANNUAL REPORT



As I wrap up my term as president, I am struck, once again, by how hard this small group works. I was drawn to volunteer with GCWA because it was apparent that this was a “working board”—and that people who served on committees or volunteered in other ways were really giving a lot of time, thought, and creative energy to the cause. That is still the case, and I know I speak for everyone on the Board in thanking those of you who have chosen to share some part of your life with the Gills Creek Watershed.

We’ve already made a significant difference in the health of the watershed. But it is even more apparent to me now that there is so much more that needs to be done. We need eyes and ears in the watershed, alerting us to potential trouble before it happens, spotting things like leaking sewer pipes and improperly controlled runoff, as well good news like thriving bird populations and kids finding ways to connect to the natural world around them. We need photographers and good storytellers, as well as people who can sample water and pick up litter.

We have so many exciting opportunities ahead of us! So, whatever your interests and abilities, please let Carmony know if you’d like to help.

What you do—whether you give time, money, inspiration, or encouragement—makes a big difference.

Thank you!



Trish Jerman

Just like the Gills Creek Watershed is a gem, each of you as our supporters, volunteers, board, committee participants, and members have created a gem of an organization. The continued success of our association is only made possible with your support and involvement—I could not do this alone!

We have made many strides over the past year to improving water quality and preserving the watershed. Looking back at our accomplishments, I am proud to say we have made an impressive impact, working with community members, local businesses, and governmental entities to restore and protect the watershed, educate our community, and advocate for sound practices. Our partnerships have grown along with our memberships. All of this combined proves that in the coming year we will be even more successful as an organization in making strides toward our vision of a vibrant, restored Gills Creek that is protected, valued, and enjoyed by all of its communities.

GCWA has a multitude of exciting plans and projects coming up, and I look forward to working with each of you to continue our impact. Thank you for your support and all you bring to GCWA!



Carmony Adler



TRISH JERMAN
Board President



CARMONY ADLER
Executive Director

AT GILLS CREEK WATERSHED ASSOCIATION, WE ARE WORKING TO PROTECT AND RESTORE GILLS CREEK.

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.

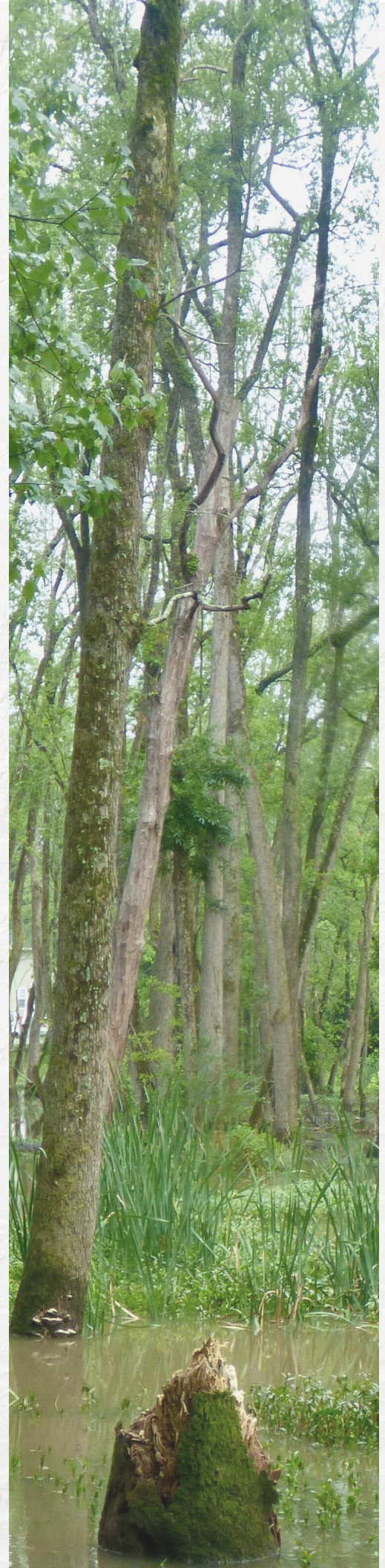
Gills Creek is among the largest impaired urban watersheds in South Carolina, with a number of water quality problems including high bacteria levels, low dissolved oxygen, litter, and sedimentation, along with high flood risks. Yet nearly 111,000 community members call the Gills Creek Watershed home, 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.

MISSION AND VISION

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

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.



MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

2020-2021





RESTORE AND PROTECT

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

- working with the City of Forest Acres to ensure a section of flood-prone land was taken out of development and will be turned into a greenspace to connect the local community to Gills Creek and reduce the impact of stormwater runoff
- beta-testing a device to keep parking lot litter from flowing into adjacent creeks, in partnership with an Eagle Scout
- initiating a plan for an “Urban Oasis” along Gills Creek to create an urban linear park and greenway, connecting and preserving Gills Creek from Crowson Road to the Congaree River
- beginning discussions with the County, and securing a subsequent grant, for reforestation plans and a naturalized trail on FEMA buyout properties along Timberlane Drive



EDUCATE

GCWA continued our new education/outreach platform using webinars and suggested outdoor activities during the pandemic, creating new partnerships and connecting others beyond the Watershed boundaries. GCWA also held tours for members to show best practices in the Watershed, including ones at Kings Grant Neighborhood, the Belser Arboretum, and bird walks along Timberlane Drive the Watershed.

GCWA installed educational signage at several sites across the Watershed in partnership with local entities to inform the public about stormwater management and preventing water quality pollution. In the process, we developed a new educational partnership with Richland County Public Library.



ADVOCATE

GCWA works to prevent future problems. We advocated for sound long-term planning in support of improved water quality and better floodplain management, including through the review of drafts of Richland County's revamped Land Development Code (LDC), providing comments, and meeting one-on-one for a follow-up discussion with County staff. GCWA was pleased to see some of our requests incorporated into the next version.

GCWA is willing to go to court to protect the creek if necessary. We submitted a comment and attended a meeting to object to a proposed action by the City of Columbia Board of Zoning Appeals (BoZA) to grant a Special Exemption allowing establishment of an auto salvage yard on a brownfield industrial site on Bluff Rd. near its intersection with South Beltline. BoZA granted the Special Exemption over GCWA's objections. GCWA subsequently joined the Columbia City Council and the Congaree Riverkeeper as plaintiffs in a complaint in District Court alleging that BoZA was derelict in not taking environmental concerns into account when granting the Special Exemption.

SPOTLIGHT ON A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

GCWA worked with a local Eagle Scout candidate, in partnership with Richland Library – Cooper and Northeast branches, with funds from a PalmettoPride grant to design and install two “litter goalie” prototypes. With GCWA’s oversight and review, the Eagle Scout candidate spearheaded the design and installation of the pilot litter goalies to keep parking lot litter out of Gills Creek and its tributaries.

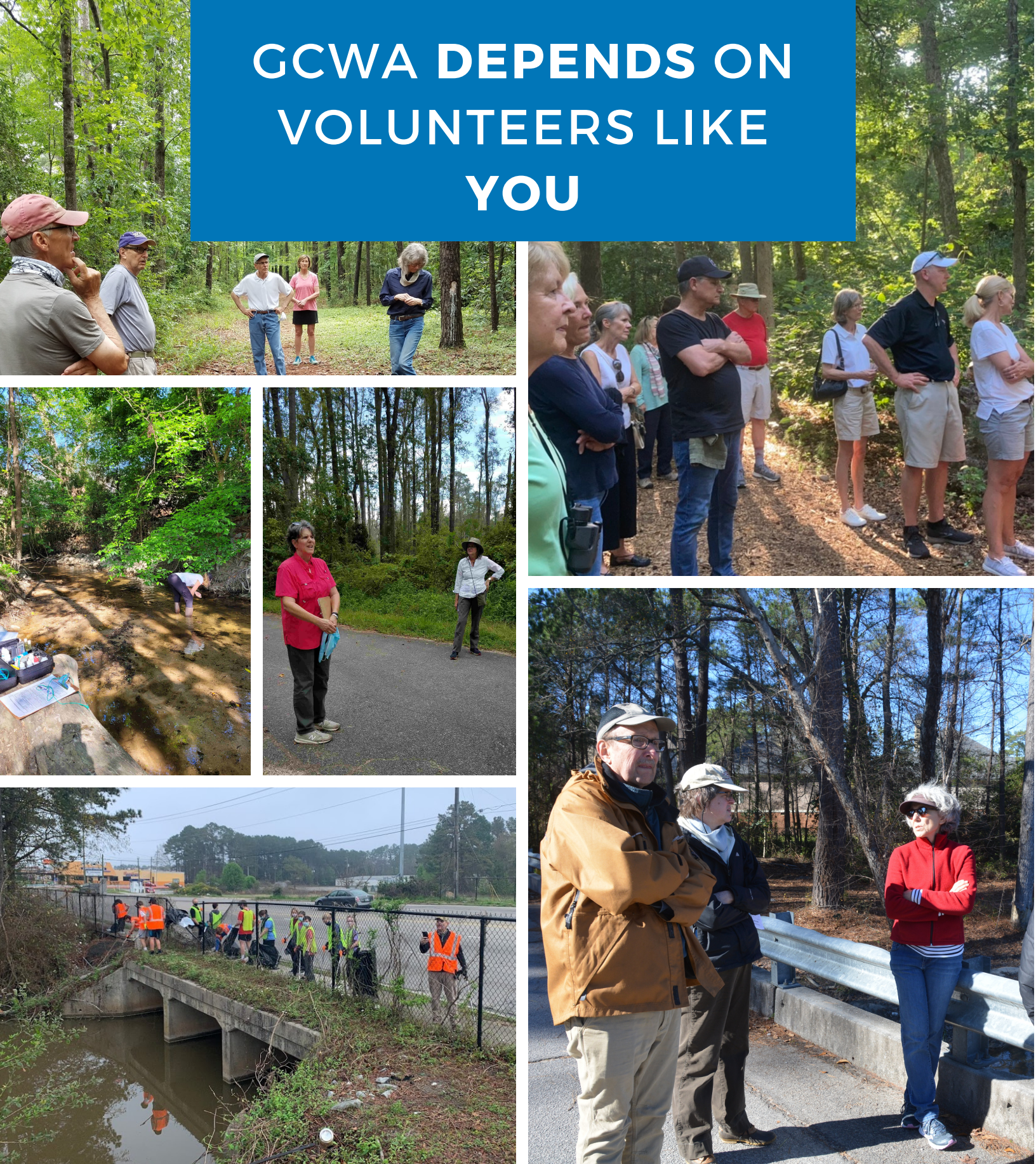
Many parking lots are constructed in such a way as to guarantee that litter will be channeled into the creek through a flume, including the lots at the two Richland Libraries.

Because the Library has a strong commitment to the environment and already has a stormwater art installation at the front of the Cooper branch, they were an excellent partner for this project. The Library’s landscape team committed to bi-weekly maintenance of the litter goalies, removing captured litter and natural materials after rain events. The Library’s maintenance team also has adjusted the goalies as needed overtime, to ensure they continue to work as intended.

Due to the litter goalie installation, the Library also removed invasive underbrush along the creek side at Cooper to make the creek more visible, with native plants to be installed. GCWA also subsequently worked with the Library to install trash cans at both locations and landmark quality informational signage, with financial assistance from PalmettoPride and Richland County Conservation Commission. Through this work, GCWA has established a long-term partnership with the Richland Library, related to stormwater management and public education.



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, MKSK, and local residents to design and execute a reforestation plan for FEMA-buyout properties along Timberlane Road.

"URBAN OASIS"

GCWA will build on the plans and partnerships developed through our Central Carolina Community Foundation grant to see that the Timberlane area becomes the centerpiece of an expanded Gills Creek "Urban Oasis" of protected floodplain property.

WATER QUALITY SAMPLING

GCWA will continue and expand our sampling efforts, engage local university interns, and assess historic and current water quality in the watershed, thanks to a 2021-2022 Richland County Conservation Commission grant.

CLEANING UP OUR WATERSHED

GCWA will continue to organize litter cleanups and prevention activities in the Watershed.



LOOKING FORWARD

EDUCATE

EDUCATIONAL KIOSKS

GCWA will install the second of a series of educational kiosks along Gills Creek, 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.

FLOODPLAIN PROTECTION

GCWA will organize a panel about floodplain preservation and environmental justice and the need for communication across a watershed for the University of South Carolina's Climate Ready Columbia Conference to be held April 1-2, 2022.

WATERSHED TOURS

GCWA will continue to offer in-person educational events and tours for our members.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR EDUCATION

GCWA will continue to partner with local entities to increase awareness of Gills Creek and its tributaries and the importance of land and water quality protection. Part of this work will include an educational effort aimed at individual homeowners within the Watershed.



LOOKING FORWARD

ADVOCATE

WETLAND PROTECTION

GCWA will work with the County and the City to ensure that trail construction near the creek will not have a negative impact on habitat or water quality.

BROWNFIELDS

GCWA will work with the Columbia Development Corporation to find solutions to development of the brownfield site formerly occupied by ITP that enhance, rather than endanger, water quality.

GILLS CREEK PROTECTION

GCWA will work with the City of Columbia and other strategic partners to seek a denial of the zoning exception for the auto salvage yard on Bluff Rd. at the edge of Gills Creek. GCWA will support strengthening development policies in both the County and the City in order to prevent future degradation of the creek. We will also work with responsible developers to achieve the best outcomes possible for the creek and those who live and work near it.

COMMUNICATION

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.



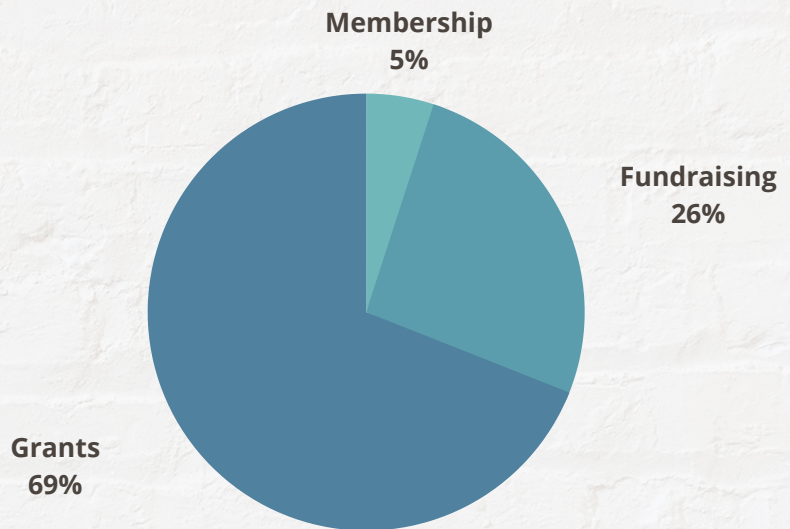
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Total income for the past fiscal year was \$144,738.28. The largest source was government grants, specifically directed towards Gills Creek enhancement and education efforts. These grants are entirely devoted to the projects for which they are obtained, and do not support our general operations. Fundraising from events, sponsors, and donors was the second largest source.

Total expenses for the past fiscal year were \$156,012.67. The largest item was Program and Grant expenses, which include restricted funds from grants and some additional non-restricted funds used for program and project activities. The second largest expenditure was administrative expenses for accounting, organizing events, and running the organization.

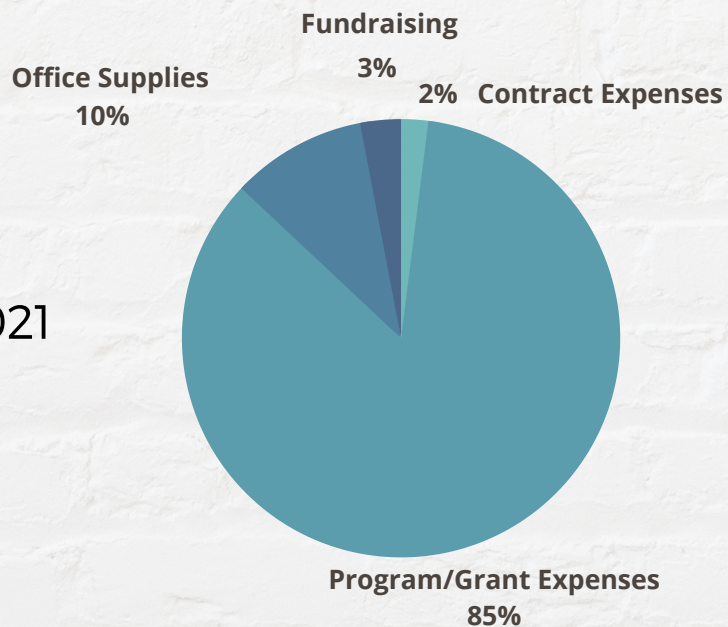
INCOME FISCAL YEAR 2020-2021

\$144,738.28



EXPENSES FISCAL YEAR 2020-2021

\$156,012.67



DONORS

CREEK STEWARDS (\$1,000+)

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Kellah Edens
Betsy Kaemmerlen
Mike Kelly
Mark and Deborah Robertson

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Crape Myrtle Garden Club	Lake Katherine HOA	Spring Lake HOA
Cary Lake HOA	Mast General Store	Mike Kelly Law Firm, LLC
Forest Lake Presbyterian Church	Service in the Soda City	

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		Jean Prothro	John and Margaret Zubizaretta

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Kendal Hall, Membership Coordinator



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WATERSHED
ASSOCIATION**