



GILLS CREEK WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

2017-2018 ANNUAL REPORT

The vision of the Gills Creek Watershed Association

To become a national model for watershed management, planning, and stewardship

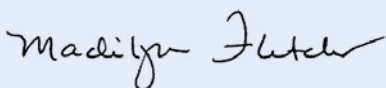
- Water quality is greatly improved and practices are in place to ensure future protection.
- The Watershed is litter-free, and lake sedimentation and flooding events are greatly reduced.
- Families and visitors enjoy biking/hiking trails, kayaking and canoeing, and other water-oriented activities.
- Stream corridors and wildlife habitat are protected and stream flows are restored.
- New development is planned to maintain good water quality and minimize degradation of natural habitat.

Our Message

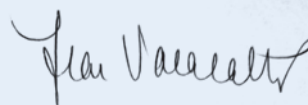
This past year has been extraordinary! We welcomed our new Executive Director, Fran Varacalli, and gave our deepest thanks to Erich Miarka, who left us after five exceptional years of growth and program expansion. Now we see our horizons extending even further with a major, new stream enhancement project and expanding opportunities for community action and stewardship. All this is made possible through the Gills Creek Watershed community – the increased membership and our wonderful donors, sponsors, and volunteers. Your contributions are

critical for the work at hand, and we are extremely grateful for your engagement and help. Please enjoy this brief report on our achievements of the past year and ambitious expectations for the year ahead. We sincerely hope you to see you at some of our activities or events over the coming year.

Thank you for all that you do for your Watershed--its environmental riches and scenic potential--and ultimately its remarkable communities



Madilyn Fletcher, Ph.D.
Board President



Fran Varacalli
Executive Director



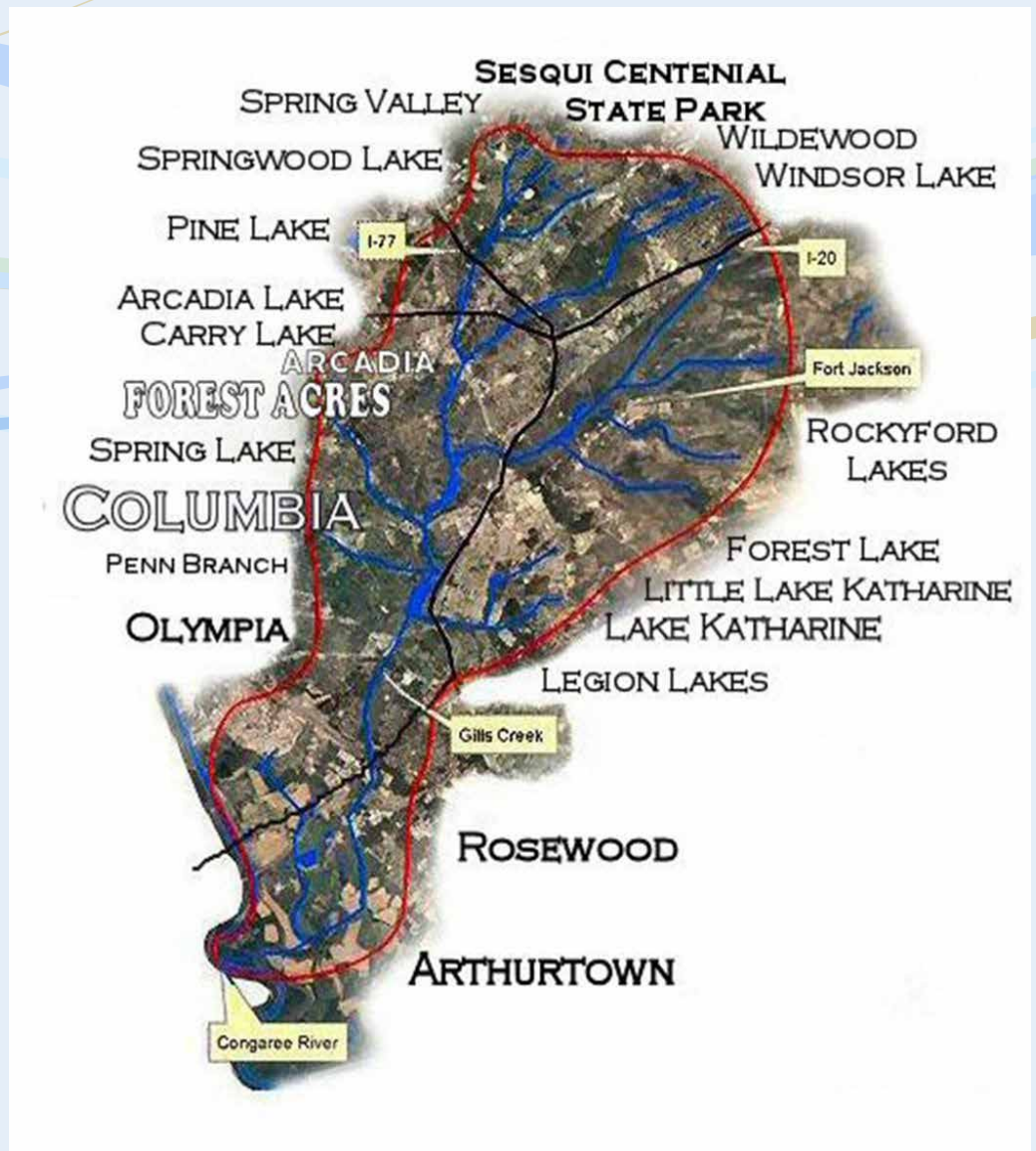
The Watershed

The Gills Creek Watershed includes all of the land surrounding the Gills Creek from which water drains into the Creek – so anything that is carried by that run-off water over the land eventually finds its way into the Gills Creek. The size of that drainage area is 76 square miles. It contains approximately 70 miles of streams, over 47,000 acres of land, and over 100 impoundments totaling 944 acres. Draining water flows into three main tributaries -- Gills Creek, Jackson Creek and Little Jackson Creek. These tributaries in turn 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.

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. GCWA incorporated as a 501c3 organization in late 1999. Since then, we have been working to engage citizens and create a strong and dedicated membership base, implement stream and lake restoration projects, and advocate for policy changes to improve water quality. We are deeply grateful to our partners in this effort – the many citizens, government agencies, and businesses who share our vision for a vibrant and healthy watershed that serves as a national model for watershed management, planning, and stewardship.



The Gills Creek Watershed

Major Achievements of the Past Year

Reducing Pollution that Enters the Creek Helps to Create Cleaner, Flourishing Water Secured funding and took first steps on the Crowson Road stream enhancement project

Design work has started on the first phase of a three-year project to continue rebuilding and revitalizing the impacted areas of Gills Creek between Fort Jackson Blvd. and Devine St. The work is supported by South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC) through the nonpoint source pollution 319h grant program, the City of Columbia, and a grant from Richland County Conservation Commission. Work will enhance 850 linear feet of Gills Creek along Crowson Road - a bottlenecked section that is one of the most impaired areas of the Creek. The primary goal is to improve water quality by reducing pollution entering the Creek, while creating an attractive and healthy space for community enjoyment. Specific actions are to stabilize and re-contour the stream banks, replant native vegetation, and provide a natural corridor for the future Gills Creek Greenway.

Completed the Nonpoint-Source-Pollution Reduction and Education Project at Owens Field

Two major bioretention cells were constructed on the Owens Field Park site to intercept stormwater runoff coming from the surrounding parking lot and neighborhoods. Bioretention cells are a recognized Best Management Practice (BMP) designed to capture water carrying pollutants so they are filtered out before the water drains into nearby waterways -- in this case Devils Ditch and Gills Creek. One of the most heavily used parks in the City of Columbia park system, Owens Field contains several soccer fields that are used by the YMCA, a high school track, baseball diamonds, and a newly constructed "Miracle Field" for handicapped park users -- all resulting in many visitors and opportunities for public education. Outreach included two public meetings, a guided site visit, and installation of an environmental education kiosk at the project entrance.

Measuring the Effect of Pollution on Food Sources in the Gills Creek to Better Understand Risks to Citizens

Completed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Environmental Justice "Fish Study"

The GCWA, working with the University of South Carolina-Aiken, was awarded an Environmental Justice Small Grant from the EPA to study the risk of mercury pollution on subsistence fishing in the lower watershed. We interviewed fishermen to better understand their consumption of fish from Gills Creek, and fish were sampled for mercury to assess exposure levels to those individuals who consume fish from the creek. After sampling from 9 sites over 9 months in 2016, overall total mercury concentrations were found to be low in fishes collected from Gills Creek Watershed sites. However, largemouth bass and bowfin at some sites were found to have sufficient quantities of mercury to warrant limits on their consumption. Public meetings were held to present the results to those communities (residents and businesses) in the vicinity of the lower Gills Creek.

Reducing Litter and Careless Trash Disposal in the Watershed Helps to Keep the Creek Water Clean

Taking Action to Control Litter at its Source

The GCWA organized and led nine clean-ups focused on trash and debris removal from lake and creekside sites and roads throughout the watershed during FY 2017-2018. Over 100 volunteers participated in the removal of over 220 bags of trash and litter from Gills Creek area and its tributaries.

Based on last year's success, the GCWA Education Committee was awarded a second Palmetto Pride grant to help reduce litter entering Jackson Creek in the Decker Boulevard area. This enabled installation of additional trash cans at "litter hotspots" along Decker to help keep litter from entering the stream system. We have now installed a total of 12 cans and associated signage over a two year period. GCWA also hosted a large community cleanup of the area and created additional outreach materials.

Expanded Public Awareness of the Value of Clean Water and Need for Litter Control

We provided numerous educational opportunities, ranging from direct contact at community events, to classroom presentations, to a public lecture that tapped into emotional as well as environmental reasons for protecting our cherished water bodies. In February, Dr. Drew Lanham, author, poet and Alumni Distinguished Professor of Wildlife Ecology and Master Teacher at Clemson University, presented a beautiful slide show and lecture, interspersed with readings from his poetry. We participated in 6 community events and festivals, potentially reaching over 7,000 people, and we provided presentations at 6 community meetings in the Watershed.

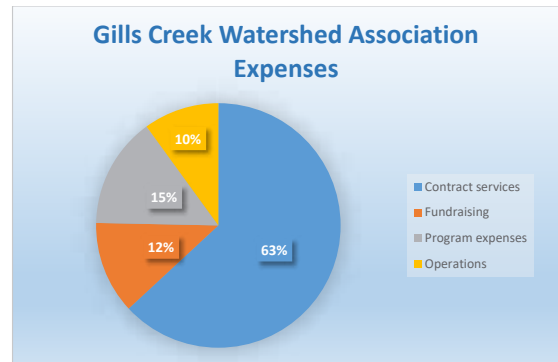
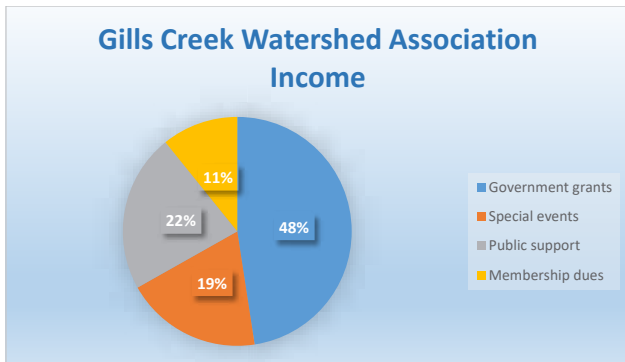


Litter Pickup for Adopt a Highway

Financial Fundamentals

Total income for the past fiscal year was \$105,456. The largest source was government grants, specifically directed towards Gills Creek enhancement efforts. Additional essential funds came from special events, sponsorships, donations, and membership dues.

Total expenses for the past fiscal year were \$70,682. The largest item was contract services, which supported the position of Executive Director. Other funds enabled fundraising, basic operations, and program requirements.



Hamilton, McKinney & Moss, Certified Public Accountants, conducted an audit of the Association for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2017. Financial documents are available to be viewed by request.

Call to Action – This Year’s Major Initiatives

Join Us! Support Us In the Year Ahead!

Gills Creek Enhancement

The design of the Crowson Road Stream Enhancement Project will be completed in 2018, and the necessary permits secured. Construction is scheduled to be completed within the following two years. We anticipate joining with our partners to offer many opportunities for recreation and education about the watershed.

Adopt a Stream

We plan to extend our water quality monitoring activities through increased volunteer participation and engagement of additional schools in the Adopt-a-Stream program. This will not only help make the public more aware of watershed-related issues and water quality, but will also identify pollutant “hotspots.”

Greenway planning

GCWA is continuing its Middle Watershed Greenway efforts by working with the County Penny Project Development Team to establish “Greenway A” along the Gills Creek west from the Crowson Road area to Mikell Lane. Scoping and design are well underway, while we look forward to beginning construction and working with our partners and neighborhood groups to ensure an enjoyable and safe greenway experience.

Community Outreach

Interactions with the community will be extended through at least four watershed education events -- such as guided walks at key locations, kayak tours, and a public lecture designed to broaden our understanding of one of the many facets of the watershed. We will continue to seek opportunities to extend learning and impact through further outreach to neighborhoods and other watershed groups, and through building our network of extraordinary volunteers.



Installation of Pawmetto Pride litter containers on Decker Blvd



Learning about watersheds at Richland Recycles event



2018 Wine for Water Annual Fundraiser

A sincere thank you to all of those who make the achievements of this GCWA possible!! To all of our volunteers, sponsors, donors, and members - we deeply appreciate your support, time, and donations.

2017-2018 Board, Staff, Organizational Members, Sponsors, Donors, and Members

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Lake Katherine Homeowners' Association
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Spring Lake Company

The Gills Creek Watershed Association offers homeowners' association and other organizations the option to join for all of their members.

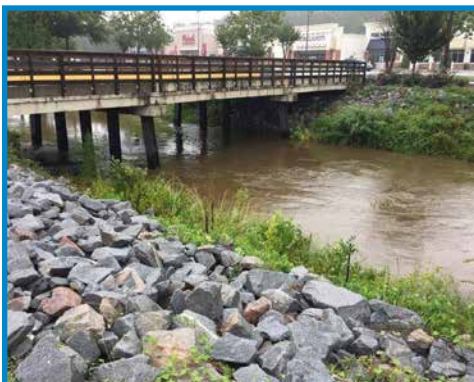
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Gills Creek at Crowson Road



Water sampling in Gills Creek



Councilmen Jim Manning (far left) and Greg Pearce (2nd from right) received "Watershed Wonder" awards for their outstanding service and dedication to the Gills Creek Watershed at the 2017 Annual meeting

Donors

\$1,000 + Level

Valerie Marcil and Henry Nechemias

\$500 - \$1,000 Level

Aetna Foundation on behalf of John and Carol
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