

Reedy River watershed project to get \$1.5 million

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Two grants totaling \$1.5 million recently were promised to the Saluda-Reedy Watershed Consortium for a comprehensive study of the Saluda-Reedy watershed.

The V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation, a principle environmental grant maker for South Carolina, has pledged \$1 million over the next two years; Fuji Photo Film has pledged the remaining \$500,000 over five years.

The consortium will use the money to study and determine the best ways to keep the Saluda-Reedy watershed clean and usable in the future.

"We are absolutely delighted about this funding," said Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, which serves as the project's coordinator. "I would anticipate getting it within the next 60-90 days, and these two parties are the first ones to contribute money for this study."

The study will include eight major tasks:

- determine all current land uses within the watershed;
- use a growth model to predict future watershed development based on current, unchanging conditions;
- identify riparian lands along the Reedy and Saluda rivers and their tributaries;
- monitor compliance with regulation standards and to assess the effectiveness of those standards;
- develop ways to protect and improve water quality;

- keep the public informed about proper water uses for the rivers by establishing watershed education centers. The Brashier Campus in Simpsonville is one potential site; and
- improve water quality.

Pollution, trash and excess sediment had tainted the Reedy River for generations. After the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972, the river began to recover through efforts to clean it up. Now, the 13-member consortium – which also includes The Conestee Foundation, Pinnacle Consulting Group, and Friends of The Reedy River – want to ensure the current level of water quality is not just maintained, but improved.

"The work will be done based on facts and science," Wyche said. "But the two grants, spectacular as they are, will not enable us to complete all of the tasks outlined in the original project. So we will be seeking additional funding."

Right now, it is unknown which section of the watershed will receive the greatest attention because of regional growth.

Within the 1,165-square-mile watershed above Lake Greenwood, the population is increasing at the rate of about 32 people per day. Open land is being converted into development at the rate of about 23 acres per day.

Based on projections by Western Carolina Regional Sewer Authority, daily waste-water discharges into the Reedy River are expected to increase from 34 million to 51 million gallons by the year 2015; daily discharges into the Saluda River are expected to increase from 13 million to 31 million gallons.

"And there is no doubt that the Saluda-Reedy watershed will continue to experience dramatic growth and change," Wyche said.

But Ray Guenther, a longtime advocate for the improvement of the watershed, said that the section running through the Golden Strip should receive the lion's share of the money, mostly because of need and size.

For example, from its source in Travelers Rest to its ending-point in Lake Greenwood, the Reedy River twists and snakes for 73 miles. Of that, about 35 miles of the waterway flows through the Golden Strip, making it the largest section of the river.

"And the portion of the river north of the Mauldin treatment plant has already been studied," Guenther said. "Whereas the portion below the plant is the one most challenged. It's where the treated water goes."

Wyche added that the specific scope of the work should be defined within the next 30 days. Regardless of the findings, the project should be a blessing to everyone who will use the Saluda and Reedy Rivers in the years to come.

"I think our mission is a good one," Wyche said. "And I think that's shared by everyone who lives and works in the watershed."
