

Sediment poses threat to Reedy watershed

Preventing future sediment from entering the lake, streams and cleaning current excess are challenges

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There is way too much sediment in the Saluda-Reedy watershed – that is the finding of a recently published study by the 12 members of the Saluda-Reedy Watershed Consortium.

The study, conducted April-November 2002, examined 875 acres – only 7 percent – of the 73-mile long watershed. The study area was confined only to the upper reaches of Lake Greenwood and a 329-acre section of the Reedy River.

But geologists concluded that this section alone contains more than 7.2 million cubic yards of excess sediment – enough to fill more than 1 million dump trucks.

If left unchecked, the sediment fill could not only cause the lake to eventually dry up, but also hamper efforts begun two years ago to improve the quality of water in the Reedy River.

"It's a big deal, a huge problem for the entire watershed, particularly for the Reedy," said Brad Wyche, director of Upstate Forever, a local organization dedicated to promoting what it describes as responsible growth, as well as preserving the Upstate's natural resources. "Because the watershed section for the Reedy has experienced more growth and development than other sections."

Much of that growth has occurred in the last 10 years within

a 1,165-square-mile Upstate watershed that feeds the man-made, 11,400-acre Lake Greenwood, including the 35-mile meandering stretch of Reedy River which cuts through the heart of rapidly developing Greenville County.

Both the river and Lake Greenwood are attractions for development, water-based tourism and recreation, and hydroelectric power generation.

Kim Kroeger, who led the sediment study for the Consortium, said all of that – plus the lake itself – could disappear unless people throughout the watershed take more interest in what happens to the Reedy River.

"All lakes will eventually fill in, but under natural conditions,

that usually takes centuries to occur," said Kroeger, a geologist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. "What is happening at Lake Greenwood is that this process has been dramatically accelerated by land-use activities and poor conservation practices in the watershed."

Which means the consortium has challenges: trying to keep excess sediment out of the lake and its feeder streams in the future, and cleaning up the excess sediment that's already in them.

Larry Smith, an engineer with Greenwood County, said cleanup would involve dredging, which at best, would be a long shot of ever happening because of strict regulations.

"Greenwood County doesn't allow dredging," Smith said. "But, if we were to get a large project funded by someone to remove large amounts of sediment

over large portions of the lake, and, if this project was properly permitted and approved by all environmental agencies and stake holders, then the county would consider allowing a project of this nature to take place."

But he added that even if such a project got the right nods of approval, it would likely be killed anyway because of cleanup costs.

"It's difficult to estimate, but we're looking in the many millions of dollars to do it," Smith said. "And it would have to be funded by state, federal or private sources. It would not be funded by our local taxpayers because they could not bear it. So what (the consortium may have to concentrate on is) nonpoint sources of sediment runoff."

On this point, Wyche suggested several ways citizens and county government can get involved in preventing future sediment runoff:

- enforce current erosion and sediment control for new developments;

- do a better job of maintaining silt fences around those developments;

- replace trees and construct riparian buffers along the Reedy River where development occurs;

- be careful with how much fertilizer is thrown into yards because it will eventually find its way into a creek, stream or river.

"I'm absolutely convinced we can have it both ways – to enjoy the benefits of economic growth while protecting our environment," Wyche said. "All of us are part of the problem and all of us are part of the solution. And the results (from the study) should be a wake-up call on the urgent need to protect the lake."