

# Can we learn from mistakes on the Reedy?

Greenville News 9/18/08

By Frank Holleman

The Saluda and Reedy rivers are the arteries of our community.

In their northern reaches, the Saluda's branches provide water for all Greenville. As they flow from the mountains, they and their tributaries are some of South Carolina's very few trout streams. Their waters flow through three great state parks: Table Rock, Caesars Head and Jones Gap.

The Saluda and the Reedy provide water for Easley and Greenwood, create some of our best recreational opportunities, and establish green ribbons of life that harbor towering trees, migrating birds and a significant portion of our natural heritage. They are the heart of RiverPlace, Falls Park and Cleveland Park in the center of Greenville, Lake Conestee Nature Park and Lake Greenwood. Ultimately, they join the Broad

and Congaree rivers, and their waters flow through South Carolina's only national park and into the Atlantic.

Today, the fate of these rivers and a material part of our community's future are at stake.

The Reedy River's history should teach us some important lessons. During the last century, our forefathers made decisions that seemed to make sense then but that proved tragic mistakes in hindsight. A bridge was built on top of Greenville's birthplace, Reedy River Falls. Golf courses were built along the Reedy, eliminating the river's important forested buffer and obstructing public access forever along significant stretches of the river. As a result, the "Reedy River Greenway" beyond Greenville Tech may well be, instead, the "Cleveland Street and Pleasantburg Drive" bike path.

At many places, the

## GUEST COLUMN



Frank Holleman, a Greenville attorney, is the past president of Friends of the Reedy River and the recipient of the 2006 Water Conservation Award of the S.C. Wildlife Federation. He can be reached at [fholleman@wyche.com](mailto:fholleman@wyche.com).

Reedy's flood plain was occupied by commercial facilities, and the riparian forest (which protects water quality) was cut down. The river and its flood

plain were not protected as a community resource, but were altered to fit the notions and self interest of the developers of that era. Destructive infrastructure was placed in the flood plain. The public was excluded. And the Reedy was used for waste disposal.

We have recognized that those decisions were mistakes, and we have begun to correct them. Instead of building more obstructing bridges over the Reedy, we have torn one down and revealed the waterfall's stunning beauty. We have discovered that the Reedy's flood plain is a great natural resource for the public — not just a select few. A greenway, bike paths and parks are springing up along the river. We have learned that public access to the waterway is a spur to economic development.

But the cost of reversing bad decisions is high. Removing bridges, sewer lines and buildings from

the flood plain are expensive projects. And the results of bad decisions are difficult to change. While there is a beautiful park in Greenville's center, the river that runs through it remains a seriously polluted waterway — so contaminated that we have to warn children to stay out.

Today, the question is whether we will learn from our mistakes on the Reedy during the last century and avoid repeating them on the Saluda rivers in this century. That question is being answered one decision at a time.

In one recent instance, the Cliffs Communities has proposed a golf course on the North Saluda that would use this trout stream as a water feature, hug its banks, and in places remove the trees that grow along it. At first, a proposed permit would have allowed the discharge of up to 175,000 gallons of

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treated sewage effluent into that small river each day. After a public outcry, that application was withdrawn, but now the developer persists in a proposal that would build 16 bridges

over the river (for 18 holes), cross the river with nine playovers, and provide for only a limited buffer along the river.

At stake are the future of the Saluda rivers — and the best interests of the entire community and future generations. Fortunately, there are nonprofit organizations that exist to protect our natural resources

and the entire community and that are raising important issues when key decisions are on the table — in this instance, Upstate Forever, Save Our Saluda, the Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, the Native Plant Society and Trout Unlimited. They deserve our support.

So, when you read about the controversy over what

the Cliffs Communities proposes to do to the North Saluda, please keep in mind that the question is not just about how one golf course is designed. The question is whether during this century we will look out for the interests of the entire community and the future of our children and grandchildren.