

# Clemson University teams up for a creek cleanup

TABITHA CORLEY | CONTRIBUTOR

In the Piedmont area of South Carolina, pollutants are a threat to the Golden Creek, Twelve Mile and Eighteen Mile watersheds. Clemson University's Cooperative Extension, along with several other organizations and partners, are joining together on a plan to combat pollution based on each watershed's individual needs.

"We all want to have water resources that are clean and enjoyable," said Cal Sawyer, associate director of the Center for Watershed Excellence at Clemson University. "If we go down to the beautiful streams and rivers that we have, we don't want to have something nagging in the back of our heads saying 'I wonder if that is clean.' We can put our kayak in there and go swimming or we can go fishing without fear or concern for any health-related problems."

Charles Gill, chairman of the Pickens County Beautification and Environmental Committee, said to his knowledge no one has experienced sickness due to the water quality, which has been an "ongoing problem."

Sawyer said they are about six weeks

into planning the project. Next summer, the team will submit the plans to the Department of Health and Environment Control (DHEC) for approval before the cleanup can begin.

Heading this effort is the Pickens County Beautification and Environmental Advisory, which won the nearly \$28,000 grant in September to study the three creeks and watersheds. The later phases of the cleanup will require more funding. Upon approval from DHEC, more money could become available as they instill a management plan, Sawyer noted.

"I think that it is a goal of our state regulatory agency and a goal of the university that we have to make the water resources clean and usable by everybody," Sawyer said. These regulations are backed by the Environmental Protection Agency under the Clean Water Act.

E. coli is one of the pollutants the Watershed of Excellence is focusing on eliminating, Sawyer said. This pathogen is commonly associated with other types of bacteria stemming from fecal



From left, Clemson research assistant Alicia McAlhane, extension agent Cathy Reas Foster, Pickens stormwater technician Kyle Bennett and Pickens County stormwater manager Scottie Ferguson check out the water quality in Twelve Mile Creek.

contamination.

Sawyer said water runoff is contaminated from fertilizers and wildlife, livestock or human defecation combined with rainfall or snowmelt washing down into the creeks.

"You can close your eyes and picture that," he said. "It comes from our neighborhoods, it comes from our parking lots, oil and gas from our cars, heavy metals or copper from our brake pads dropping

in a parking lot, and rainfall hits it and washes it into the nearest surface water body."

Sawyer said many people will have a chance to help with the cleanup process, especially in the initial planning stages where they are currently. He said at least two public meetings will be held where people can come to share insights and view photos and maps of the cleanup areas.

"We can look down and say, 'Here is probably where a spot could be.' Then we have to talk to the people who actually live there, work there and play there and ask them, 'Does this make sense?'" Sawyer said. The goal is

for the public to be "intimately involved," he said.

Sawyer said the meetings could start as early as January 2016. In the meantime, Sawyer and his colleagues are working on other projects in the Upstate that would weave together with the watershed cleanup. For more information on how to get involved, contact Sawyer at calvins@clemson.edu or 864-656-4072.



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