

# Upstate Forever releases first ever Saluda-Reedy Watershed report

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Staff Writer

Upstate Forever has just released a 26-page report on the health and the future potential of the Saluda-Reedy Watershed and concluded that if proper action is taken now, further deterioration of these major waterways from sediment build-up, manmade pollution and other problems can be avoided and even reversed.

"This report represents two and a half years of very painstaking data-gathering, about how far we've come and where we're going," said Jennifer Rennicks, watershed project coordinator at Upstate Forever.

Over the next few weeks, Rennicks will be sending copies of the report to state leaders, legislators, city and county officials, private corporations, Chambers of Commerce and every agency involved in helping maintain South Carolina's precious water resources.

The Saluda-Reedy Watershed, stretching from northern Greenville and Pickens counties to the dam at Lake Greenwood, has become the best-studied watershed in the state. For more than two years, teams of scientists and researchers from universities, state agencies, consulting firms and nonprofit organizations have studied the watershed from multiple angles.

The result is a report compiled by that consortium titled "The State of the Watershed," covering

ground over much of the Upstate; the watershed itself covers almost all of Laurens County. The report is a call for help from industry and government, and also from public issue groups, civic groups and individual citizens.

Water quality as a political issue became a real thing to many residents just seven short years ago when, in 1999, a troubling algae bloom made Lake Greenwood into a mushy green mess.

King Dixon of Laurens, past chairman of the Laurens County Chamber of Commerce board of directors, spoke Feb. 14 at a forum organized at the Drummond Center on Lake Greenwood to debut the report, spread its news and underline the lake's environmental importance to Laurens County.

In his remarks two weeks ago, Dixon called Lake Greenwood a "diamond in the rough" that has had a tremendous impact on the county's future, in terms of quality of life, growth and economic development, property values and the county's tax base, and said he hoped the development of adequate water and wastewater services would be top priorities for Laurens and Greenwood counties over the next two decades.

"One of the things that really stands out in this report is the relationship of the quality of our water to the quality of life," Dixon said Monday at the board of directors meeting of the

Laurens County Chamber of Commerce. "We know now that water is valuable stuff. All sorts of good things are beginning to happen around Lake Greenwood, and I would urge the Chamber to be supportive of all the efforts being made in this area."

The authors of the watershed report hope it will spur a grassroots movement of local leaders and residents who will organize and work together to provide adequate protection for the land area that drains to Lake Greenwood.

"There will be a remarkable swing to advocacy, outreach and education," predicted Rennicks. "We hope to influence policy at the county and city level. This is a slow process. It's going to take a while."

The watershed encompasses over 1,100 square miles, includes nearly 1,500 miles of streams, and is over 80 miles long.

"Though its boundaries are subtle and pass unnoticed by most of its residents, what happens within our watershed has a real impact on our rivers — and on our quality of life," said Rennicks. "Future growth depends on protecting water quality — not just in the rivers themselves, but across the watershed as a whole."

The report and the consortium of agencies that put it together were funded by one-time, five-year grants from Fuji Corp. Inc. of Greenwood and the VK. Rasmussen Foundation totaling



**BLOOMING ALGAE** — Lake Greenwood residents were perplexed and troubled by an algae bloom that covered the lake for much of the summer of 1999, inhibiting local fishing and boating activities.

\$2.5 million.

Besides Upstate Forever, those agencies include Clemson, Lander and Furman universities, Friends of the Reedy River and the Friends of Lake Greenwood. Conestee Foundation, the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, the Upper Savannah Land Trust and many others.

"They say we're going to be the monkey wrench in the works but that has never been the way," Rennicks said of critics who see

environmentalism as an obstacle to development. "It's really all about water. Everybody cares about water quality. We consider this to be a very pressing issue; we live in an area blessed with water resources."

The report provides snapshot vignettes of problem areas in the watershed but also viable solutions that are readily available from the experts. Technical solutions and voluntary compliance are the watchwords of the move-

ment; it will be up to the local governments to strike the difficult median between development and the preservation of resources. Rennicks added, "What we do know is that the ball will not be dropped. Our goal is very simple: pure, clean, abundant water. Save it for the long term."

The report can be seen online at [www.saludareedy.org](http://www.saludareedy.org). To request a copy, write to Upstate Forever at P.O. Box 2308, Greenville, SC 29602.

Photo courtesy Upstate Forever