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Researchers monitor health of river

Simpsonville subdivision's rise causes major changes in stream, study finds

Published: Monday, April 9, 2007 - 2:00 am

By Anna Simon
CLEMSON BUREAU
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CLEMSON --Recent headlines told of an algae bloom in Lake Greenwood, and fingers pointed upstream to Greenville's Reedy River.

Now a Clemson University researcher and some graduate students are keeping watch over the Saluda River, to see if development along that waterway begins to upset the balance of nature again.

Five sampling stations collect Saluda River data including depth, sediment, organisms, water quality and quantity, and changes in the river channel.

Waterways change as the use of land around them changes, said John Smink, a Clemson University water quality research specialist.

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Clearing land, paving areas and fertilizing lawns all have an impact, Smink said.

His words echo concerns of Dean Moss, a member of the state Gov. Mark Sanford's water law review team. Moss was the keynote speaker at a recent Clemson forum on water issues facing the Upstate.

"We have water quality problems on virtually every watershed," Moss said, adding other states have similar problems.

And while current regulatory monitoring checks for impairments from biological contaminants to zinc, there's no sampling for "personal-care products, all kinds of weird stuff," Moss said.

checks for impairments from biological contaminants to zinc, there's no sampling for "personal-care products, all kinds of weird stuff," Moss said.

The purpose of the forum was to gather Clemson researchers to spur more water-related research, such as this project, to help the state manage growing urbanization and growing demand on the water supply.

Smink and the students examined the impact of development on two streams -- one where homes were built and one kept natural, in a Simpsonville subdivision he declined to name.

They found substantial differences.

Within the first year, the developed stream was noticeably deeper, after trees were clear cut and the subdivision was graded, Smink said.

There was a dramatic increase in sediment and nitrates in the developed stream after rains, and the water level rose and fell quickly and sharply, compared to the undeveloped stream, which rose slightly and gradually, and then returned to its usual level.

Aquatic insects used to measure the health of the ecosystem completely disappeared from the developed stream.

There's no question that development is coming to the Saluda River, Smink said.

The question is how we can have development and increase the economy and at the same time protect the aquatic ecosystem, he said.

There are steps landowners, homeowners, contractors and the general public can take to protect the balance of nature, Smink said.



200m
ALAN DEVORSEY / StaffCheckup: Katie Sciera, in creek, and Sarah Robinson, both Clemson graduate students in environmental toxicology, take cross-sectional readings of Hunnicutt Creek on the campus near the Botanical Garden as John Smink, a Clemson University water quality research specialist, checks the volume of water flowing in the creek. They're studying how development affects area streams and rivers.

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