

The choice is clear on water quality issues

BY GARY HENDERSON
staff writer

Whether the watershed drains to the Tyger River, the Lawson's Fork or the Pacolet, decisions made by Spartanburg County business leaders, developers and government officials determine the quality of life for nearly 300,000 people

Environment experts say recreation, economic development and water quality are among the many areas of daily life that hinge on how well communities protect rivers, creeks and small streams.

Upstate Forever, a local nonprofit conservation organization, recently launched its 2006 schedule of field trips and watershed tours that are available to business leaders, community advocates and government officials at no charge.

"Clean, abundant water is a critical resource for the Upstate, and protecting our water quality will require broad collaboration across the entire region," said Jason Van Driesche, director of watershed conservation for Upstate Forever.

Controlling storm water, reducing erosion and sedimentation and managing floodplains will be presented from an executive perspective. Speakers will em-

phasize the opportunities for high-quality development that comes with effective protection of water resources.

While participants won't learn how to install a silt fence, they will hear about the economics of water quality, future uses for watersheds and ways to fund innovative protection programs.

"Everyone has seen the recent success of development projects along the Reedy River in downtown Greenville," Van Driesche said, referring to the large park developed in the heart of the business district. "Those projects wouldn't have happened without clean water in the river."

Dr. Gibbes Patton, a retired Wofford College biology professor whose interest in the Lawson's Fork and other watersheds is legendary in Spartanburg, said he hopes elected officials, Chambers of Commerce and developers will realize these programs are important.

Patton said watershed basins make it "crystal clear" there are limits to how much impact the systems can withstand. Further, Patton said it is correct to think of watersheds and floodplains with a regional scope.

"You're going to hear more and more about water quality-of-life and scarcity of

resources," Patton said. "The whole idea of going, going, going with development without considering what we're doing to the ecosystem and habitat doesn't make much sense."

The Saluda-Reedy rivers watershed will be the laboratory example used for this series of field trips and programs.

Field trips will begin at carefully selected sites in the upper part of the watershed. They continue at downriver sites all the way to Lake Greenwood.

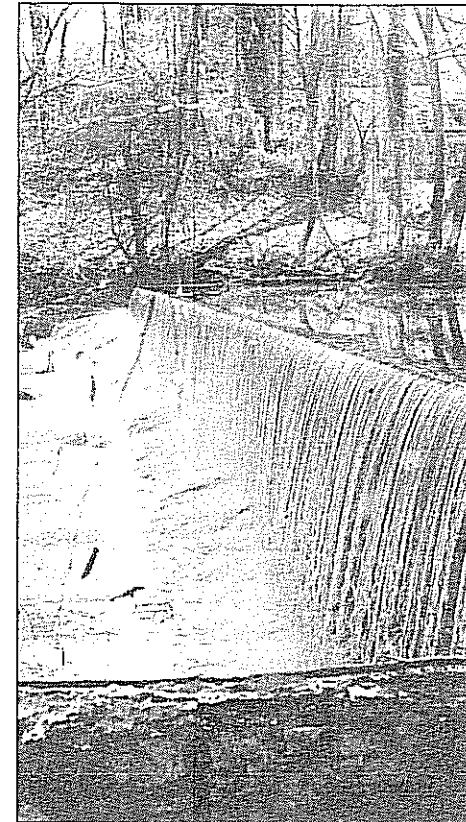
The sites exemplify both good and bad practices of watershed conservation. Transportation between sites in 15-passenger vans, instruction, site visits and materials will be provided. Lunch will be provided on longer trips.

Some of the trips qualify for continuing education credit.

Expert speakers will make presentations at each location. The programs range from 90-minute seminars to half-day field trips and full-day tours.

"You can put blinders on and just peek out through the slits," Patton said. "But you won't be able to see your grandchildren through the slit."

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Michelle Mogavero/Staff

WITH THE FLOW: Water pours over the White's Mill dam on Lawson's Fork.

Tour the watershed

May 2 – Land use and water quality in the Greenville metro area

May 25 – Economic development and water quality in the Lakelands Region

June 8 – Impacts of land use change on Lake Greenwood

Take a field trip

April 28 – How to identify erosion control problems before they start

May 11 – Learning from Charlotte's floodplain management program (Full-day trip)

May 31 – Low-impact development as a

market differentiation strategy (Half-day trip)

June 13 – Key management issues in Lake Greenwood and other Piedmont lakes (Half-day trip)

June 23 – Infrastructure management and risk reduction in urban floodplains

June 30 – Innovative storm water management on small urban sites

For more information or to register for any of these events, call Kathy at 596-5075 or go to www.saludareedy.org/outreach/tours.html