

# Gills Creek Watershed Association

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**Strategic Plan  
December 2010**



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*The mission of the Gills Creek Watershed Association is to restore and protect the Gills Creek watershed by uniting citizens, government, organizations, and business*

## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

The Gills Creek Watershed Association (GCWA) was originally formed in the late 1990s by a group of citizens that noticed a decline in water quality in the Lake Katharine area. With the support of Richland County, in 2006-07 the GCWA reformed with a major focus on comprehensive watershed management. Since 2007, the GCWA has been working to improve its organizational structure, create a strong and dedicated membership base, implement stream and lake restoration projects, and advocate for policy changes to improve water quality. The GCWA had a number of major milestones in 2009 including electing its first official board of directors, initiating a membership program, and holding its first fundraiser event. Additionally, GCWA has worked to engage citizens and residents in the watershed on how to best protect and restore Gills Creek.

As part of its initial organization efforts, a Vision Statement was adopted by the Board in 2007 to project the aspirations for the Association:

By 2018 the Gills Creek watershed will be a national model for watershed management and planning. Citizens are enjoying the bike and walking trails throughout the watershed and it serves as the basis for an environmental education curriculum for Richland County Schools. All new development is carefully studied for its impact on the watershed and many of the mistakes of the past have been corrected. The stream corridors have received special attention, accommodate diverse wildlife and natural flows and capacities have been restored. Water quality is much improved and best management practices are working. An example is that there has been no net loss of pervious surfaces, in fact, there has been a measurable reduction in impervious surfaces in the past 3 years. Current codes reflect strong support from the public and encourage “green” development. The watershed is litter-free and sedimentation in the lakes has been drastically reduced. A task force composed of governmental representatives and citizens is a model for a coordinated approach to planning, regulation and development in an environmentally sensitive area.

To guide the course of the Association in achieving its vision, a strategic planning initiative was made in 2007 under the auspices of the Clemson Institute for Community Economic Development. By late 2009, the Board determined that an updated Strategic Plan would be in order, as most of the goals and objectives of the first plan had been achieved. A Planning Committee was formed and began meeting in January 2010. Diana Toledo of the River Network provided facilitation of this work, including a Board retreat held in June 2010. The Plan was presented to the Board and officially adopted in December 2010.

The Planning Committee began by interviewing 16 stakeholders who had diverse experience in working with the GCWA. From these interviews, a list of critical issues was developed to focus the assessment of the current effectiveness and future orientation of the Association. These issues then served as the ‘fodder’ for the Board retreat, which provided a general Board consensus on a set of Goals for the Association to concentrate its work in the next few years.

Following the retreat, the Planning Committee then generated this Plan of more detailed Objectives and Activities associated with them. Interim versions of the Plan were reviewed and revised by individual Committee Chairs as appropriate.

An initial set of five goals emerged to address the work GCWA should undertake to advance its mission. Two additional goals were articulated to deal with internal organizational issues. As it developed, the goals had a good fit within the existing Committee structure, with little need to re-organize at that level. The Plan attempts to map out how these Committees can work most effectively and efficiently as a young organization with limited resources.

The committee structure is as follows:

Executive Committee: oversight of all Board and Association functions, and special focus on the organizational issues promoting a stable and competent Association.

Membership Committee: point of initial contact for residents, groups, and jurisdictions interested in GCWA.

Education Committee: promotion of targeted, in-depth educational functions for GCWA constituencies, and coordination of GCWA public events.

Technical Committee: continuing the analysis begun with the GCWA Management Plan to identify and prioritize restoration projects in the watershed.

Financial Stewardship Committee: oversight of the Association's financial management and reporting, and coordination of fundraising strategies.

The Goals for this Strategic Plan are as follows:

**Goal #1: Improve water quality, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities in the Gills Creek watershed by promoting and implementing restoration projects that engage and benefit the community.**

Oversight: Technical Committee (unless otherwise noted)

**Goal #2: Inform and educate decision-makers and stakeholders in the watershed about the importance of effective watershed management and actions they can take to protect and restore the Gills Creek watershed.**

Oversight: Education and Outreach Committee

**Goal #3: Serve as a respected advocate for stormwater management and land use practices that will improve water quality in the Gills Creek Watershed.**

Oversight: Staff with Board of Directors

**Goal #4: Increase GCWA membership on a sustained basis and engage members and the larger community in GCWA's mission and programs.**

Oversight: Membership Committee

**Goal #5: Develop a financial management system and a sustainable fundraising strategy to support GCWA programs and staff and to implement this strategic plan.**

Oversight: Financial Stewardship Committee

**Goal #6: Develop strong and active committees that implement GCWA programs, engage the community, and develop GCWA future leadership**

Oversight: Executive Committee with Coordinator

**Goal #7 Develop GCWA Board of Directors to include a number of strong leaders and a membership that understands and fulfills its roles and responsibilities as Directors.**

Oversight: Executive Committee with Coordinator

The following pages present the Strategic Plan in detail with proposed timelines. It is anticipated that it will form the core of each Committee's work plan for the months and years ahead.

**Goal #1: Improve water quality, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities in the Gills Creek watershed by promoting and implementing restoration projects that engage and benefit the community.**

**Oversight: Technical Committee (unless otherwise noted)**

Objectives & Activities	Timeline & Notes
<b>Objective 1: Reorganize the Technical Committee membership and formalize committee operations (e.g. quorum, minutes, voting).</b>	
<b>Activity 1.1.1:</b> Review current committee members and solicit new members to ensure inclusion of representatives from the GCWA, Richland County, City of Columbia, Fort Jackson, state agencies and other interested technical persons or groups. The Committee will be comprised of voting (GCWA members, 7 max.) and non-voting members (State and local governments).	Q4 2010
<b>Activity 1.1.2:</b> Increase committee effectiveness by requesting that a single individual represents each of the defined jurisdictional members	Q1 2011
<b>Activity 1.1.3:</b> Elect officers (Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary) to ensure proper Committee procedures such as notice, a quorum, proper voting procedures, and that minutes are taken and distributed.	Q1 2011
<b>Objective 2: Identify and prioritize restoration projects, BMP retrofits and land conservation/preservation efforts that meet Goal #1 along Gills Creek and its tributaries.</b>	
<b>Activity 1.2.1:</b> Work with jurisdictions to update priority lists by facilitating analysis across jurisdictional boundaries to encompass the entire Gills Creek watershed.	Q1 2011
<b>Activity 1.2.2:</b> Develop consensus criteria for prioritizing GCW projects by determining relative importance of preservation vs. restoration, the potential benefit of BMPs, and considering other factors such as cost, visibility, likelihood to succeed and distribution of projects across subwatersheds.	Q3 2011
<b>Activity 1.2.3:</b> Review data and prioritize projects in each subwatershed.	Q4 2011, 2012
<b>Activity 1.2.4:</b> Identify potential projects for upcoming fiscal year.	Q2-Q3 2011, 2012
<b>Activity 1.2.5:</b> Present list of priority projects projects to city/county council, staff, and affected neighborhoods.	Q1 2012, 2013
<b>Objective 3: Encourage watershed-wide projects by strengthening relationships and communication with jurisdictions</b>	
<b>Activity 1.3.1:</b> Identify key actors and decision-making bodies in each of the Jurisdictions.	Q1 2011
<b>Activity 1.3.2:</b> Identify activities specific to building stronger relations w/ City of Columbia.	Q1-2 2011 w/ Ex. Comm.
<b>Activity 1.3.3:</b> Explore facilitation role between City & County for Lake Katharine siltation issue.	Q1-2 2011 w/ Ex. Comm.
<b>Objective 4: Initiate two priority restoration projects</b>	
2013-14	

**Goal #2: Inform and educate stakeholders in the watershed about the importance of effective watershed management and actions they can take to protect and restore the Gills Creek watershed.**

**Oversight: Education Committee**

Objectives & Activities	Timeline & Notes
<b>Objective 2.1: Provide diverse opportunities for residents and members to participate in activities directly linked to Gills Creek</b>	
<b>Activity 2.1.1:</b> Represent GCWA at community events (with Membership Committee	ongoing
<b>Activity 2.1.2:</b> Coordinate 2 active clean-ups or clear-outs/year.	Q2 2011, 2012
<b>Activity 2.1.3:</b> In partnership with Keep the Midlands Beautiful, encourage and publicize Adopt-a-Stream opportunities.	Q2 2011
<b>Activity 2.1.5:</b> Coordinate GCWA Adopt-a-Road commitment	Q2 2011
<b>Objective 2.2: Engage citizens in water quality activities through partnerships with neighborhood associations.</b>	
<b>Activity 2.2.1:</b> Identify citizen concerns by organizing listening sessions as part of one neighborhood meeting or event in three sub-watersheds	Q1 – Q4 2011
<b>Activity 2.2.2:</b> Identify citizen concerns by organizing listening sessions as part of one neighborhood meeting or event in remaining four sub-watersheds.	Q1 – Q4 2012
<b>Activity 2.2.3:</b> Design and organize 1 broad-based outreach event/year to address particular citizen concerns.	2012 - 2013
<b>Objective 2.3: Engage developers in water quality educational activities.</b>	
<b>Activity 2.3.1:</b> Identify ‘showcase’ projects and companies.	Q1 2011
<b>Activity 2.3.2:</b> Develop event or campaign to promote best practices.	Q2 2011
<b>Objective 2.4: Engage businesses in water quality educational activities.</b>	
<b>Activity 2.4.1:</b> Follow up with Adopt-a-Stream opportunities at Trenholm Plaza	Q1 2011
<b>Activity 2.4.2:</b> Develop pet waste campaign with pet stores, veterinarians.	Q1 2012

**Goal #3: Serve as a respected advocate for stormwater management and land use practices that will improve water quality in the Gills Creek Watershed.**

**Oversight: Staff with Board of Directors**

Objectives & Activities	Timeline & Notes
<b>Objective 3.1: Establish a system for bringing water quality concerns/violations to appropriate authorities</b>	
<b>Activity 3.1.1:</b> Promote GCWA general e-mail address as means for the public to communicate watershed concerns.	Q1 2011 & ongoing
<b>Activity 3.1.2:</b> Develop a simplified mechanism for general membership to document and report water quality problems to Technical Committee/Coordinator.	Q2 2011
<b>Activity 3.1.3:</b> Create a database and a process for tracking complaints to be sure they are being addressed in a timely manner.	Q3 2011
<b>Activity 3.1.4:</b> Create a standard process of informing appropriate authorities of water quality concerns.	Q3 2011
<b>Objective 3.2: Coordinate with existing programs and organizations to promote protection of parcels with conservation value in the watershed.</b>	
<b>Activity 3.2.1:</b> Identify parcels with high conservation value (See Objective 1.2).	Q2 - Q3 2011 w/ Tech. Comm.
<b>Activity 3.2.2:</b> Reach out to local land trusts to explore partnering opportunities including conservation of parcels.	Q4 2011 & ongoing
<b>Activity 3.2.3:</b> Reach out to jurisdictions (e.g. Richland County Conservation Commission) to promote conservation of parcels.	Q4 2011 & ongoing
<b>Activity 3.2.4:</b> Research and evaluate potential role of GCWA in conservation easement program as a revenue source.	Q1 2012
<b>Objective 3.3: Advocate for decisions related to land use planning and zoning that protect water quality.</b>	
<b>Activity 3.3.1:</b> Ensure that GCWA receives public notices and is informed regarding zoning changes, variances, and new construction in the watershed.	Q2 – Q4 2011
<b>Activity 3.3.2:</b> Define criteria for land-use issues that the GCWA will become involved with.	Q3 2011
<b>Activity 3.3.3:</b> Take action as needed on those decisions (e.g. comment on permits, testify before committees, mobilize GCWA members etc.)	2012 w/ Ex. Comm

**Goal #4: Increase GCWA membership on a sustained basis and engage members and the larger community in GCWA's mission and programs.**

**Oversight: Membership Committee**

Objectives & Activities	Timeline & Notes
<b>Objective 4.1: Support membership targets as defined in Annual Fundraising Plan (see 5.2.1).</b>	
<b>Activity 4.1.1:</b> Identify sub-watershed Committee leaders.	Q1 2011
<b>Activity 4.1.2:</b> Develop & maintain contacts with organizations in watershed for recruitment and educational purposes.	ongoing
<b>Activity 4.1.3:</b> Gain two new associational memberships per year through presentations and personal meetings with associations' leaders.	Q2 2012, 2013
<b>Activity 4.1.4:</b> Coordinate 1 creek-based social/recreational event per year.	Q2 2011
<b>Activity 4.1.4:</b> Develop membership mini-campaign(s) based on social networks of members (Event incentives, Challenges, Merchant programs, House Parties).	Q1 2012
<b>Activity 4.1.5:</b> Represent GCWA at community events (with Education Committee) and follow up with new contacts.	ongoing w/ staff, Board
<b>Objective 4.2: Present watershed perspective and role of the GCWA to jurisdictions and business groups.</b>	
<b>Activity 4.2.1:</b> Make at least 6 presentations annually to jurisdictions and business groups	Q4 2011, Q4 2012
<b>Activity 4.2.2:</b> Approach CPAC green business program membership for sponsorship/partnership opportunities.	Q3 2011
<b>Activity 4.2.3:</b> Work with Richland County Stormwater Consortium to develop green business recognition program.	Q1 2011
<b>Objective 4.3: Develop a consistent and professional identity in all Association graphic materials.</b>	
<b>Activity 4.3.1:</b> Update brochure, PPT presentation, table materials	Q1 2011
<b>Activity 4.3.2:</b> Develop style guide for all GCWA authors/presenters to follow	Q4 2011
<b>Objective 4.4: Research/assess membership patterns for sustained support.</b>	
<b>Activity 4.4.1:</b> Evaluate membership data (zipcode, sub-watershed, renewal rates, etc.) to identify areas of strong support and identify areas to target for additional outreach	Q1 2012
<b>Activity 4.4.2:</b> Plan membership survey for Year 3 (2012-13) for Strategic Plan update	Q2 2012



**Goal #5: Develop a financial management system and a sustainable fundraising strategy to support GCWA programs and staff and to implement this strategic plan.**

**Oversight: Financial Stewardship Committee**

Objectives & Activities	Timeline & Notes
<b>Objective 5.1: Provide GCWA with the necessary information and resources to ensure the organization is financially sound.</b>	
<b>Activity 5.1.1:</b> Prepare an annual balanced budget that is formally approved by the Board	Q2 annually
<b>Activity 5.1.2:</b> Provide Board with quarterly financial statements to be reviewed and discussed at Board meetings	All quarters
<b>Activity 5.1.3:</b> Track and record all incoming and outgoing funds using Quickbooks	Ongoing
<b>Activity 5.1.4:</b> Develop a balance sheet (Assets and Liabilities) to be included in each annual report	Q2 annually
<b>Objective 5.2: Ensure GCWA has the financial resources it needs to carry out its work.</b>	
<b>Activity 5.2.1:</b> Develop an annual Fundraising Plan that sets specific fundraising goals for a diverse set of fundraising tactics (e.g. events, membership income, sponsorships, government and foundation grants, Board giving and income from jurisdictions) and outlines a Board and staff workplan for securing those.	Q2 annually
<b>Activity 5.2.2:</b> Present plan to the Board of Directors for formal approval	Q2 annually
<b>Activity 5.2.3:</b> Engage all Board members, committees and staff with stewardship presentation	Q2 2011
<b>Objective 5.3: Develop a comprehensive, long-range financial strategy for sustaining GCWA.</b>	
<b>Activity 5.3.1:</b> Research creative funding mechanisms used by other watershed organizations (e.g. conservation easement monitoring or other fee-for-service mechanisms)	Q1 2012
<b>Activity 5.3.2:</b> Set long-term goals for increasing and diversifying income	Q2 2012

**Goal #6: Develop strong and active committees that implement GCWA programs, engage the community, and develop GCWA future leadership**

**Oversight: Executive Committee with Coordinator**

Objectives & Activities	Timeline & Notes
<b>Objective 6.1: Clearly articulate the Association’s mission and each Committee’s activities.</b>	
<b>Activity 6.1.1:</b> Develop Memoranda of Understanding(MOU) with Richland County, City of Columbia, and Fort Jackson to define their relationship with and participation in GCWA.	Q2 – Q4 2011
<b>Activity 6.1.2:</b> Create one-page description of each Committee’s role with work plans for each committee	Q 1 2011
<b>Activity 6.1.3:</b> Develop guidelines on 'Best Practices' for committee functions. (See Appendix 1.)	Q1 2011
<b>Objective 6.2: Ensure continued strong leadership of GCWA’s committees</b>	
<b>Activity 6.2.1:</b> Identify ‘succession plans’ for each committee’s leadership	Q4 2011
<b>Activity 6.2.2:</b> Evaluate and review committee function/progress on an annual basis	Q1 2012
<b>Activity 6.2.3:</b> Establish training resources/opportunities for Committee chairs and members	Q1 2012
<b>Objective 6.3: Ensure effective and efficient communications between committees, full Board and the Executive Committee</b>	
<b>Activity 6.3.1:</b> Establish protocols for reporting on meetings to the Board	Q2 2011
<b>Activity 6.3.2:</b> Study a modified Board meeting schedule and Committee reporting formats	Q4 2011

**Goal #7 Develop GCWA Board of Directors to include a number of strong leaders that understands and fulfills its roles and responsibilities.**

**Oversight: Executive Committee with Coordinator**

Objectives & Activities	Timeline & Notes
<b>Objective 7.1: Clarify expectations of GCWA Board members</b>	
<b>Activity 7.1.1:</b> Create, review and affirm a 'Statement of Commitment' for Board members	Q4 2010 & annually
<b>Activity 7.1.2:</b> Conduct annual Board member self-evaluation	Q3 2011 & annually
<b>Activity 7.1.3:</b> Develop presentation on stewardship and 'friend-raising' for Board members	Q2 2011
<b>Objective 7.2: Ensure Board is representative of the community and members are those best able to carry out GCWA's work</b>	
<b>Activity 7.2.1:</b> Review Board membership, identify gaps and define recruitment goals.	Q2 2011 & annually
<b>Objective 7.3: Orient all new Board members</b>	
<b>Activity 7.3.1:</b> Update Board informational packet, board bios and distribute to all new Board members	Q3 2011 & annually
<b>Activity 7.3.3:</b> Hold social event for Board members/spouses	Q4 2011
<b>Objective 7.4: Engage Board Advisors in ways that are mutually beneficial.</b>	
<b>Activity 7.4.1:</b> Review Advisory Board composition and link with specific committees as appropriate.	Q2 2011