



Self-Guided Tour – Gills Creek Watershed

1. Owens Field Park: 1351 Jim Hamilton Blvd, Columbia, SC 29205. This park is Richland County property but leased by City of Columbia to operate Owens Field Park. This area receives a lot of runoff from adjacent parking lots and neighborhoods. This stormwater runoff eroding parts of the park and contributing pollutants and sediment to Devils Ditch, a tributary of Gills Creek. Walk the perimeter trail behind the skate park to see some of the effects of the runoff. In 2013, GCWA secured a DHEC 319 grant to install bioinfiltration cells along the heavily eroded sections of the park, and the work was completed in 2017. These BMPs will intercept and infiltrate stormwater runoff thus improving the water quality and filtering out sediment before the water reaches the creek. You can park at Owens Field Park or the Memorial Stadium parking lot. The trail begins at the foot of the Memorial Stadium lot, identified by a kiosk with a map and lots of information about the park and the project. Lot is on the corner of Holly St. and Airport Blvd.
2. Devils Ditch: 3630 Plowden Rd, Columbia, SC 29205. Devils Ditch is a tributary of Gills Creek and drains much of the Rosewood neighborhood, including Owens Field Park. This creek has been highly impacted over the years and much of the channel is now armored. This project is the result of a coordinated effort among Richland County Stormwater Management, City of Columbia, and GCWA, which began in 2010. In the section of the Devils Ditch located between Live Oak Street and South Beltline Boulevard, engineering services were to perform maintenance and repairs to the ditch. The scope included removal of overgrown vegetation and accumulated sediment, repairs to the creek, and application of appropriate bank & bed 'localized' stabilization to the ditch to prevent future erosion and scouring.
After a number of false starts and delays related to obtaining property easements and a project involving the Jim Hamilton - Owens Field Airport, the project was completed in 2017. There is a service road next to the bridge on Plowden where you can park. Note: Mitigation for this project was carried out at the upper end of the watershed at Little Jackson Creek (see Stop #15).
3. Intertape Polymer Culvert: 2000 S. Beltline Blvd, Columbia, SC 29201 (enter through the truck/delivery entrance off of Shop Road). This bridge and culvert are pooling flow on Gills Creek and creating an artificial wetland. This is also an impediment to fish passage and paddleability. GCWA applied for a dam removal grant but was denied. The site is currently up for sale, and its future is uncertain. Presently the GCWA conducts periodic litter pickup near the property.

4. Middle Watershed: 1919 Tall Pines Cir, Columbia, SC. Go to the end of Tall Pines near 1919. From here you should be able to see Gills Creek and the surrounding floodplain. This is a sample of the Middle Watershed area of Gills Creek. The RC Penny Project Development Team has the lead on a greenway to be established along the creek between Devine St and ultimately Shop (or Bluff) Roads, and we are in early stages of design.



5. Rosewood Crossing (Old Kmart Site: 4400 Ft. Jackson Blvd., Columbia, SC 29209). The property line extends across the creek and up to Crowson Road. Currently there is pavement all the way to the top of bank on both sides of the creek and all stormwater runoff is going straight to the creek without treatment. The GCWA was recently awarded a SCDHEC grant for stream restoration, which included matching funds from the City of Columbia and Richland County Conservation Commission, to enhance the creek along Crowson Road, and in the area between Ft. Jackson Blvd and Devine St. Design work has begun, and we anticipate the project to be completed within 3 years.

6. Wildcat Creek entrance to Gills Creek, 4924 Kilbourne Rd. Columbia SC 29205. Just upstream from this point is the junction where Wildcat Creek meets Gills Creek, just below the Lake Katharine Dam. You can park on the side of Shady Lane and walk to the bridge on Kilbourne Road. You can also walk up Shady Lane and take a left at a dirt road/trail to walk to the Lake Katharine Dam. This is a good view of Lake Katharine and a reminder of the dramatic rescues from flooded homes during the 2015 flood.

7. Pen Branch: 1564 Brennan Rd, Columbia, SC, 29205.(Note: this section of Brennan is a dead end across Trenholm Rd. from the rest of Brennan.) Pen Branch is a highly impacted and impaired tributary of Gills Creek. As you can see here, Pen Branch is armored in many sections and underground in other sections. Pen Branch drains the AC Flora, Richland County Fashion Mall, and Morganelli's area and dumps into Little Lake Katharine. Park at the apartment complex on Trenholm next to Pen Branch

8. Eightmile Branch Erosion: 1893 Parrish Dr, Columbia, SC. These new homes and cleared lots were subsequently the cause of some serious erosion problems along Eightmile Branch Forest Acres did not have a buffer requirement for construction, which allowed the developer to clear all the way to the top of bank. The banks finally gave way and residents on the other side of Eightmile Branch (on Creek Vista Way) lost significant portions of their back yards and exposed a sewer line that runs along the creek. Luckily the County and Forest Acres were able to secure an emergency federal grant to stabilize the bank. GCWA worked with Forest Acres to develop a Stormwater Buffer Ordinance that applies to new development and redevelopment that



qualifies. It requires 50ft buffers and aligns with Richland County's buffer ordinance. Park on Parrish Drive. Eightmile Branch is also accessible from the Cooper Branch of the Richland County Public Library. Park at the back of the lot and look for an eroded area leading from the parking lot into the woods behind the library. This section of the creek drains the new Lowes grocery store and the new development underway on the old Cardinal Newman site on Forest Drive. Eightmile Branch joins Gills Creek near the Zoe's on Forest Drive, and is visible from the parking lot and adjacent alley behind Zoe's, TD bank, and other structures.

9. Arcadia Woods Lake, 1012 Arcadia Lakes Dr, Columbia, SC. The owners of this lake were forced to drain their lake because the dam was deemed unsafe by DHEC. The result is a mostly empty lake with a little bit of water remaining near the dam itself. SCDOT holds an easement over the top of the dam for Arcadia Lakes Rd and the pond owners do not own the dam. According to the lake owners, SCDOT altered the shape and slope of the dam when they built Arcadia Lakes Rd on top. The increased slope of the dam led to the current problems with the dam and eventual draining of Arcadia Woods Lake. The dam owner, who is now deceased, claimed no responsibility for maintaining this dam. Park on Arcadia Woods Road.
10. Tree of Life Raingarden: 6719 N Trenholm Rd, Columbia, SC. To the right of the building (if looking from the street) is a raingarden made possible by GCWA, Arcadia Lakes, and Tree of Life Congregation. This raingarden collects stormwater runoff and infiltrates it into the ground, filtering out pollutants and sediment as it does so.
11. Cary Lake via Dent Middle School: 6950 N Trenholm Rd, Columbia, SC. If possible (and on a weekend), drive to the rear of the school site to get a look at Cary Lake. This is the upstream end of Cary Lake and as such receives the bulk of the sediment being carried in Little Jackson Creek and Jackson Creek. Cary Lake was dredged in 2011 by Richland County Stormwater with help from GCWA. The Cary Lake Dam failed during the 2015 flood, but has now been rebuilt. However, the road that had passed along the top of the dam was not rebuilt.
12. Old Zorbas: 2628 Decker Blvd, Columbia, SC. This site was purchased by Richland County Stormwater Management . The site used to be a restaurant and contributed a lot of litter to Jackson Creek and Cary Lake. The Kahn Pond and Cary Lake are just downstream of this site on the other side of Decker. The County has torn down this building, and plans for the property are still undetermined.

13. Central Court Magistrate (formerly Decker Mall): 2500 Decker Blvd, Columbia, SC. Richland County purchased this old mall and converted it into a magistrate court. The design included a number of environmentally friendly features, such as BMPs for capturing stormwater runoff, pervious pavement, and plantings.
14. Jackson Creek Elementary School, 7150 Trenholm Rd Extension, just before O'Neil Ct. Turn right onto Trenholm Rd Extension from Decker Blvd and continue over the bridge. On a weekend, and if accessible, park in the school parking lot. This site is adjacent to Little Jackson Creek and Jackson Creek and contains wetlands. GCWA worked with Cary Lake HOA, Richland County Conservation Dept, and Richland School District 2 to ensure that water quality was addressed before, during, and after construction. If the school parking lot is not accessible, park in the curb cuts/pull in off of N. Trenholm Rd.

Bonus Stop:

Sesquicentennial State Park. "Sesqui" is an easily overlooked gem. It sits astride Jackson Creek near its headwaters and provides a good example of all we hope for in a headwaters stream. The entrance to the park is located on U.S. 1, just North of a railroad overpass. Follow the entrance road to its terminus at the park office. The Jackson Creek outfall of the lake is just beyond the office. It tumbles over two concrete ledges which serve to stabilize the raceway and further oxygenate the water. From here the Creek meanders through the lower park toward its encounter with civilization. At the upstream end the creek enters the lake a short hike up the lakeshore past the park facilities. It meanders through a classic floodplain forest before flowing under a culvert into the lake. Take a minute to recharge your batteries in the quiet beauty of the park before heading downstream to engage the forces of "progress."