



2014 Summary

2014 was a great year for Save Our Saluda! Coal ash was front and center, and we are excited to share the good news on removal of this significant threat to the river. Water quality monitoring continued, and SOS is actively working to encourage support and expansion of volunteer monitoring efforts in our area. Read more about these and other SOS issues and initiatives below:

Removal of Coal Ash on the Saluda River

“Coal is one of the dirtiest energy sources on the planet. It is used to produce half of America's electricity and is the country's leading source of global warming pollution. Coal threatens our fish and wildlife, pollutes our waters, destroys our mountains, and releases toxic chemicals into our communities.” *National Wildlife Federation*

“Coal ash – the waste material left after coal is burned – contains arsenic, mercury, lead, and over a dozen other heavy metals, many of them toxic. And disposal of the growing mounds of coal ash is creating grave risks to human health.” *Physicians for Social Responsibility*

In September 2014, through an agreement facilitated by the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) representing SOS and Upstate Forever, Duke Energy committed to remove coal ash from two landfill ash storage areas on the banks of the Saluda River near Williamston at its W.S Lee Steam Station. These storage areas along with two major water-filled coal ash lagoons also situated next to the river, are a continued source of toxins that readily leach into soils, groundwater, and surface waters. With continued pressure from SELC, Duke announced in December that they will remove all the coal ash at the Lee facility (3.2 million tons), including ash from the two wet lagoons, to safer dry lined storage away from the river. Subsequently, Duke also entered into a consent agreement with the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) for removal of the ash. Over recent months, SCDHEC and SELC raised serious questions about the safety of the coal ash lagoon dams as these dams have failed to meet minimum industry safety standards for years. Duke has now decided to close the lagoons, eliminate the dams, and move all the ash to dry lined storage.

This is the first agreement between conservation groups and Duke for removal of coal ash. With this agreement, South Carolina will be the first state in the Southeast where public utilities have either cleaned up, are cleaning or have committed to clean up every major ash lagoon in the state. A big THANK YOU to our river champion Frank Holleman and his team at SELC for their excellent work on this historic agreement!

SOS Monitoring Update

The SOS volunteer water monitoring is coordinated through the Georgia Adopt-a-Stream (AAS) program. Three SOS Board members are currently certified to complete chemical, bacterial and/or biologic water monitoring. Monitoring establishes baseline water quality data that can help identify potential sources of pollution. Monitoring results can be viewed at <http://www.georgiaadoptastream.com/db/>. SOS monitors five sites along the North, Middle and South Saluda Rivers. In 2014, SOS received a grant from the Greenville Zoo to establish a bacterial monitoring program and also received a grant from Foothills Paddling Club for equipment and supplies. The bacterial monitoring tracks the amount of E. coli bacteria in the rivers. Bacterial levels in the Upper Saluda Rivers have decreased in recent months with decreased water temperatures. To learn how to become a citizen monitor, please contact SOS for more information.

Water Withdrawal Issue

In 2010, SC passed the *South Carolina Surface Water Withdrawal, Permitting Use, and Reporting Act*, <http://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t49c004.php>. The law is fundamentally flawed as it is based on assumption that it is safe to withdraw all water in excess of the minimum in-stream flow, which would not provide adequate protection for natural resources, according to the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) <http://www.edistofriends.org/reading-room/dnr-comments-draft-surface-water-regs-2011>.

Of particular concern, among others, is the exemption for agriculture for any size withdrawal and water rights that would be secured in perpetuity without regard to downstream users. Last year, Walther Farms, an out-of-state mega farm, requested to withdraw *nine billion gallons per year* from the South Fork of the Edisto River and had a second request in for a significant withdrawal downstream from the first. Although registered withdrawals were reduced for this particular case, the threat to SC's surface waters remains, and our own State Department of Agriculture Commissioner is talking with California growers about relocating to our state as we have no agricultural water restrictions.

Last fall Amy Armstrong of the South Carolina Law Project, on behalf of riparian land owners across the state, including SOS board members, filed a motion for taking of riparian property rights through the Surface Water Withdrawal Act's agricultural registrations (which are exempt from permitting) seeking to enjoin SCDHEC from issuing any new registrations. DHEC filed a motion to dismiss. DHEC's motion to dismiss was defeated, but the injunction was not granted. The next step is a full hearing, yet to be scheduled.

Water Allocation Planning

The SCDNR will be developing surface-water models for each of the State's eight major river basins, the Saluda Basin being the first. Models will simulate water levels of major reservoirs and flows in major and minor rivers and streams, will quantify water availability at withdrawal and discharge sites, and will be used as decision-support tools for SCDHEC's surface-water permitting program and SCDNR's water policy and water planning work. Much concern has been expressed in the past regarding DHEC's disregard of similar DNR studies and recommendations on water policy, planning, and management and whether or not the new study would be considered any differently. Model development will be a stakeholders process in which SOS will seek to engage.

Recreational Use on the South Saluda

SOS continues to monitor the issue of recreational use on the South Saluda at Blythe Shoals.

In late 2013, a Limited Liability Corporation initiated a lawsuit in South Carolina asking the court to find a section of the South Fork of the Saluda River known as Blythe Shoals as being non-navigable. This section of river is a whitewater run, and the case could impact paddlers' rights to enjoy this stream and others. The lawsuit was filed against the State of South Carolina, several upstream landowners including a land trust, and the general public. American Whitewater and the Foothills Paddling Club filed a motion to intervene in the case under the representation of Nathan Galbreath of Nelson Galbreath, LLC. The case was heard in Greenville County Summary Court in December 2014 and the judge denied a summary judgment motion with no explanation. The case will now go to trial.

Saluda River Blue Way Update

The vision of the Saluda River Blue Way is a 127-mile Blue Trail along the six Upstate South Carolina counties that border the Saluda River including Abbeville, Anderson, Greenville, Greenwood, Laurens, and Pickens Counties. This six county collaboration and public/private partnership is a regional joint effort to promote and preserve our local natural resource by creating river access and resource awareness.

Phase One is 48 miles, beginning at the Saluda Lake Dam and ending at the Ware Shoals Dam. It includes 14 kayak/canoe access points, 7 of which would achieve full ADA compliance. The scope also identifies 3 locations to formally develop boat ramps to accommodate small watercrafts as well as 5 portage points around the five hydropower facilities. Recent efforts have been focused on a 9-mile section in northern Anderson County. The County has established 2 handicap dock accesses – Dolly Cooper Park (completed) and Timmerman landing (WIP). Greenville County has purchased a 14-acre site north of the Piedmont Dam for a river access (WIP). Development plans are continuing with a technical assistance grant from the National Park Service to help with planning/ development issues for dam portages and river access acquisition.

The Anderson County Saluda River Rally continues to grow. Over 300 paddlers participated in the 5th annual rally in June 2014. The Saluda River Blue Way will be a huge catalyst in the economic growth of the small towns along the Saluda River.

Saluda River Watershed Interactive Map

Volunteer and GIS expert Eric Potts has completed a web-based interactive mapping tool for viewing and querying watershed information. The map can be used to help further public awareness, education, and conservation efforts of SOS and others. This application allows users to navigate through the Saluda River Watershed to identify various water and land use features. This is a great educational tool that anyone can use and that we will be looking to further develop and expand as resources become available.

The SOS Interactive Watershed Map can be accessed from our website (www.saveoursaluda.org), the first link under Resource Links.

Stormwater Management

Stormwater design standards in state and local policies date back to the early 1990s when flooding issues were primary concern. There has since been recognition for the need for improved stormwater regulations for water quality and channel protection and many jurisdictions in our region and throughout the country have long since updated their state and local regulations. SC, with a few exceptions, has not. SOS will be working with local and regional partners to get this conversation started for jurisdictions in the Saluda Watershed!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saluda River Rally

The Saluda River Rally is a paddling even to get folks out on the water. It is hosted by Anderson County and usually held the first week of June. Stay tuned for more info!

River Sweep

Beach Sweep/River Sweep is an annual event for South Carolina since 1988 and is held in conjunction with The Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup, which involves several hundred-thousand volunteers in over 75 nations. Organized by S.C. Sea Grant Consortium in partnership with S.C. Department of Natural Resources, it is the largest one-day litter cleanup of South Carolina's beaches and waterways. Every third Saturday in September thousands of South Carolinians volunteer to clear trash from our beaches, rivers, lakes, marshes, and swamps. Stay tuned for details on the Saluda River cleanup!



SOS Mission:

Protecting and restoring the Saluda River Watershed through environmental awareness and citizen action.

www.saveoursaluda.org

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