

How Development Impacts Water Quality

by Erika Hollis, Clean Water Director, Upstate Forever

This following article is an excerpt from the Spring/Summer 2020 issue of the Upstate Advocate, Upstate Forever's twice yearly publication sponsored by Pacolet Milliken Enterprises. To read the entire newsletter, go to <https://www.upstateforever.org/newsletter>. If you'd like to be added to our mailing list to receive future issues, please email athacker@upstateforever.org.

It can't be overstated. Water is the single most important resource on the planet. All life as we know it—everything you've ever experienced—exists because of water.

We are fortunate in the Upstate in that most of us have access to plenty of clean drinking water whenever we need it. In recent weeks, I've been even more appreciative of the fact that I have access to clean, reliable water with a turn of the tap. Think about how difficult a simple hygienic measure like hand washing would be without easy access to clean running water.

And yet, in this part of the world, in an era of modern convenience, it's all too easy to take clean water for granted. It's easy to forget the value of water and the immense role it plays in our daily lives.

We can't let that happen here. As our region grows, it's more important than ever to protect water quality in the Upstate.

You've probably noticed that the Upstate is losing large tracts of land to development. In fact, the Upstate's pave-over rate is equivalent to almost one new Haywood Mall (and its parking lots) every single day. Unplanned growth, also known as sprawl, has serious negative effects on our water quality. Flooding, erosion, and pollution are just a few of the woes that come with paving over too many of the natural areas that filter and absorb water.

So what can we do to reduce these impacts? The best solution is to leave land next to waterways undeveloped, creating a buffer that can filter pollutants, lessen the impacts of flooding, and safeguard our drinking water supplies.

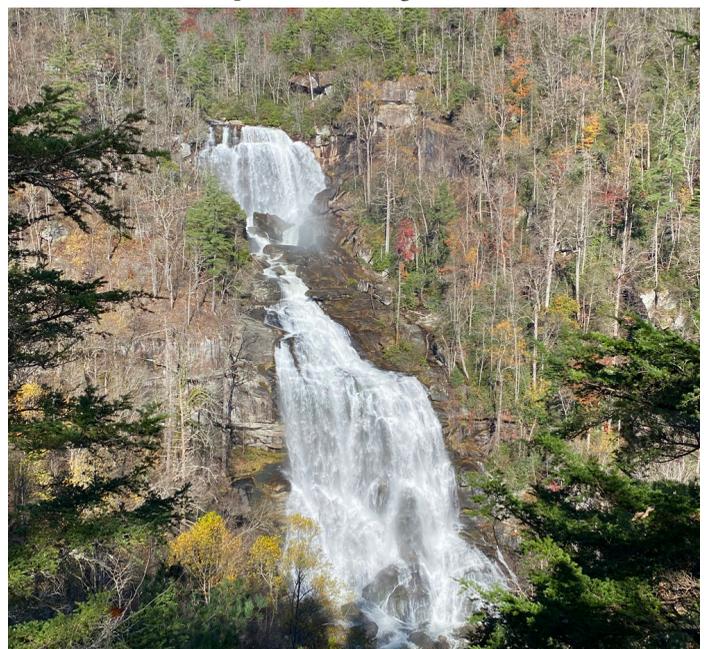
Land protection is also the most cost-effective way to protect water quality. According to a study by the Trust for Public Land, every \$1 spent on land protection saves \$27 on water treatment costs, because it keeps our waters clean, naturally, without the need for costly infrastructure upgrades. That's a great return—on any investment.

In this part of the state, most people get their drinking water from surface water, which is essentially water from a local river or reservoir. Currently, the majority of rivers and streams carrying the Upstate's drinking water are not protected. It's essential that we work now to find strategic ways to protect our drinking water sources.

Fortunately, many groups in the area, including Upstate Forever (UF), are working to safeguard our water through advocacy efforts, sprawl reduction, and land protection.

The effort to ensure clean, abundant water matters to us all. Here are some things you can do as a private citizen to help safeguard our water:

- Monitor your local waterways by becoming a citizen scientist through South Carolina's Adopt-a-Stream program or by keeping a log of what's happening in your local creek, river, wetland, or lake. Learn more at bit.ly/scaas.
- Tell your state representatives that water matters to your community. Our state legislators like to hear from their constituents. It doesn't have to be complicated—a quick call or email gets the message across. Find your state officials at bit.ly/sclegislators.
- Tell your local elected officials too! City and County officials often set priorities based on what they hear from their constituents. If protecting green space and water quality are important issues to you, your local officials need to hear that! Consider writing them a letter, sending an email, or picking up the phone to make your voice heard. We've put together a resource to help you at upstateforever.org/local-officials.
- Pay attention to other local city and county council issues and participate when you can. Remember, many policies governing how we manage land, construction, and transportation can impact our local waterways. UF currently offers e-newsletters with updates and alerts related to Greenville and Spartanburg growth issues; sign up at upstateforever.org/email.
- Be on the lookout for alerts from UF and our partner organizations. We will let you know when action is needed on issues affecting our water resources. Follow us on social media (Facebook | Instagram | Twitter) and sign up for our water issues e-newsletter, The Water Log, at upstateforever.org/email. Erika Hollis can be reached at ehollis@upstateforever.org ❖



White Water Falls. The highest waterfall east of the Rockies.