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Clemson, Lexington County governments agree to work on stormwater problems

LEXINGTON – Officials in Lexington County have joined forces with Clemson University’s Carolina Clear program to tackle stormwater issues on a countywide basis in order to protect watersheds.

Representatives from Lexington County and the municipalities of Cayce, Irmo, Lexington, Pine Ridge, South Congaree, Springdale and West Columbia signed a joint resolution creating the Lexington County Stormwater Consortium in a ceremony Tuesday (Feb. 26) at the Lexington Town Hall Municipal Complex.

The goal is to minimize polluted stormwater runoff by educating the public, builders, contractors, developers and government officials, according to Cal Sawyer, Clemson Extension water quality coordinator.

“Public education and involvement is required under an Environmental Protection Agency regulation called the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase II stormwater program,” Sawyer said.

“We need to keep the water in our streams, rivers and basins as clean as possible,” said Billy Derrick, chairman of Lexington County Council. “It’s a public health and safety issue.”

“Most of our streams, except for a few isolated areas, run into Lake Murray, which has become the reservoir for drinking water for cities such as Columbia, Lexington, Cayce, West Columbia, Irmo and Chapin, plus many rural areas,” he said.

Derrick said that the reason stormwater runoff has become such a major issue is that as Lexington County adds more people, business and industry, it also adds more impermeable surfaces in the form of rooftops, parking lots, driveways and roads.

“That has affected our water quality. We don’t have the same buffers and filters we used to have,” he said.

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West Columbia Mayor Bobby Horton was unable to attend the signing, but in an earlier interview he noted the importance of public support in the effort to protect water resources.

“West Columbia and the customers it serves are totally dependent on Lake Murray and its tributaries,” Horton said. “We must take all measures necessary to protect this and other water resources in the Midlands.”

Clemson University has been involved with water quality issues for more than 50 years through teaching, research and Extension, according to George Askew, associate director for Agriculture and Natural Resources, Public Service Activities.

“This experience working with audiences such as architects, engineers, developers, contractors, local governments, agency officials and the general public provides Clemson with a suitable foundation for working with folks in the greater Lexington area,” Askew said.

Bill Blackston, Clemson Extension area watershed agent for water quality, pointed out that all South Carolinians need to understand that our actions have an impact on water quality.

“How you maintain your garden, where you wash your car, oil spilled on the ground, fertilizers used around the home or on the farm and sediment-laden runoff from construction, agriculture or forestry practices can all degrade bodies of water,” Blackston said.

“We all live downstream, and how well we take care of the water runoff as it moves down hill in the streams, lakes and rivers on its trip to the ocean determines what the quality of that water system is,” he said.

On hand to sign the joint resolution, in addition to Derrick, were: Cayce – Mayor Avery Wilkerson Jr.; Irmo – Mayor John Gibbons; Lexington – Mayor Randy Halfacre; Pine Ridge – Mayor David L. Busby; South Congaree – Mayor Larry Jackson; Springdale – Mayor Pat Smith; and West Columbia – Tommy Parler, mayor pro-tem.

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