



PRESS RELEASE

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Watershed Alliance Invites Elected Officials to Experience South River

For the most part, the experience that most residents of south DeKalb County have with South River is limited to what can be seen from a highway bridge crossing. Through their **Beyond the Bridge** project, South River Watershed Alliance (SRWA) is looking to change this. The project will feature three activities over a multi-year period aimed at increasing the citizen/river connection: a photographic series of the river to be displayed at venues throughout south DeKalb County, creating a user-friendly map of the river which will be distributed throughout the county, and canoe outings for citizens to experience the river firsthand.

SRWA will officially launch Beyond the Bridge on April 28, 2012. The goal of the project is to build long-term community support for the designation of South River as a Water Trail. The kickoff event for Beyond the Bridge is a 5.5 mile guided canoe outing for an up close and personal encounter with South River. This will be the first of three outings in 2012.

“Our goal is for all stakeholders, elected officials, members of the business community, community leaders, and citizens to come away from this experience with a heightened appreciation for the river’s beauty and value and the potential it holds for south DeKalb County communities,” says Jackie Echols, SRWA’s president. In July 2011, SRWA unveiled *South River 2020*, an eight and a half year initiative to build community efficacy and sustained community involvement in support of South River. This project is part of that larger plan.

A water trail is a recreational and educational corridor comprised of access points, boat launches, forests, parks, refuges, and other public amenities. It provides connections to an areas diverse history, ecology, geology, and wildlife. The water trail designation will be a positive contributor to local communities along the river, providing economic stimulus and protecting resources that are important to the quality of life of local residents.

No one agency or office bestows the water trail designation. Rather, it is the culminating activity or crowning achievement of a community-wide effort. The planned river outings are only the first steps in a lengthy process, but they are a critical first step. South River is DeKalb County's most obscure and undervalued natural resource. SRWA is committed to changing this situation by cultivating a sense of pride and ownership that will elevate the river from its current place of obscurity to one of prominence.

The outing on April 28 focuses on getting the county's elected officials and media on the river. Invitations were mailed several weeks ago. Echols believes that a water trail can play a major role in transforming south DeKalb County. "Achieving the designation of water trail for South River will require the support of all stakeholders but the support of DeKalb's elected officials is particular important. This is an opportunity for the CEO and BOC to show their support for the river and communities that lie along its path. The county has done an admirable job of acquiring greenspace. What we have in south DeKalb County is greenspace with a river running through it, which moves the barometer of possibilities to a whole new level." Contingent upon funding, SRWA is planning at least two more outings before the end of the year for citizens and other stakeholders.

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Visit South River Watershed Alliance on the web www.southriverga.org.