



**The mission of South River Watershed Alliance is to protect and restore the water quality and biodiversity of the South River watershed to the beneficial use of people and wildlife.**

## December 2015

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**"Education and action are the cornerstones of environmental protection".**



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## **South River Water Trail Debuts**

### ***Potential of SRWT in five words***

The highlight of South River Watershed Alliance's (SRWA) festive 2015 South River Jamboree was a presentation by the organization's president, Jackie Echols, who spotlighted why the South River Water Trail (SRWT) is the future of the South River. The SRWT also provides enormous possibilities for DeKalb, Rockdale, Henry, Newton, and Butts counties, so much so that they have formed a partnership to make it a reality.

The SRWT's potential can be summarized in five words - recreation, economic, education, conservation, and social.

Urban areas are where most people live and the South River holds a variety of recreational opportunities for tourist and residents alike. As part of the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area, the SRWT will attract river and outdoor enthusiasts from near and far in search of the magic of nature.

With people comes increased local spending at restaurants, shops, and hotels and creation of new businesses such as outfitters. This new economic activity creates jobs that expand local tax bases.

The water trail will provide an outdoor classroom environment for children, youth, and adults to learn more about the river's rich ecological diversity and history. Environmental education and awareness will help to support and sustain a culture of river conservation and stewardship.

Finally, the water trail will strengthen social connections that link all downstream neighbors around a common goal - securing the river's future by working together.



Lithonia Mayor Deborah Jackson was among South River Water Trail supporters attending Jamboree. Photo: Jackie Echols



2015 South River Hidden Gem paddle  
Photo: Georgia River Network

In 2012, there were about 600 water trails nationwide. Currently, there are 15 established water trails and 17 under construction in Georgia. Not only will the SRWT improve recreation and enhance economic growth, its popularity will focus the public eye on issues that affect the river's health like managing stormwater and reducing trash pollution.

Additionally, the water trail will raise the visibility of ongoing restoration projects such as

restoring and protecting migration corridors for fish and wildlife, and replanting riverbanks with native rivercane to improve water quality and reduce flooding.

Safe and legal access are key components of the water trail. Members of the SRWT work group have identified eight (8) potential water trail access sites: Panola Shoals, Everett Property (DeKalb County); Lorraine Park & Trailhead, Oglesby Bridge Road (Rockdale County); Butlers Bridge Road (Henry County); Hwy 81, Newton County

Water and Sewer Authority property (Newton County); and Georgia Power property (Newton County). Work group members extend their sincere thanks to all SRWT supporters.

SRWA would like to extend special thanks to DeKalb County Commissioners Mereda Johnson and Stan Watson for assistance that will enable the county to apply for a 2015 Recreational Trails Program grant from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. If successful, this grant will be used to improve river access at Panola Shoals and Everett Property, creating the first complete section of the SRWT.

To view the [SRWT map](#) and read more about the water trail, visit the [SRWT website](#).

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## Part II - A Holiday Message from SRWA

This is Part II of the op-ed entitled "Save our rivers" written by Jackie Echols, president SRWA, which appeared in the July 15, 2015 edition of Creative Loafing. As we prepare for the holiday season, the op-ed is reprinted here in hopes that it will inspire and serve as a reminder to not take our urban waterways for granted or underestimate their value. Let us not assume they will always be there to serve us without us needing to give recognition or thanks. Part I of this op-ed appeared in SRWA's November newsletter posted on the SRWA website..



South River - Rockdale County  
Photo: Jackie Echols

## Save our rivers

From the river's headwaters in East Point, just north of Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, to its end in Jackson Lake in southeast Georgia, neighbors have come together to restore and protect the South River. SRWA is a diverse and inclusive organization focused on environmental education, raising community

awareness in support of the river, and connecting individuals and communities to the river and each other. It's done so through a paddling series, rivercane restoration, and river clean-ups. SRWA is also planning the South River Water Trail and spreading the river's story to help people better understand urban waterways and increase environmental advocacy.

Many citizens continue to look to regulatory agencies to safeguard the environment and communities. The very name of regulatory agencies conveys the idea that the environment and communities are being protected. But that is not always the case. As William Sanjour, a former EPA regulations writer and author has noted, agency regulator workers are paid to do what they're told. In addition, the public's interest is not always as dedicated as the industry's.

That's why it's important to keep eyes on Atlanta's 2015 draft Clean Water permit, which holds the city accountable for the effective functioning of its combined sewer overflow system and achieving water quality standards. A revised permit is currently under consideration by EPA and EPD. The federal consent decree agreement that is supposed to eliminate DeKalb County's huge sanitary sewer overflow problem also deserves attention. It only requires that the county complete assessments, inspections, and reports. There is no specified yearly reduction requirement or timeline of eliminating the overflows. Based on the county's own data, the approximately \$700 million upgrades ordered by the feds won't accomplish their task.

At stake if either of these regulatory actions falls short is not only cleaner water in the South River and its tributaries, but healthier communities. Urban streams crisscross Atlanta and DeKalb's densely populated landscape, flowing through neighborhoods, backyards, parks, and greenspaces. Improved water quality has a positive impact on the environment and people's quality of life.

Sustained community involvement and action is essential to the restoration of urban rivers and streams. The stories of restoring waters resonate with themes of recovery and redemption - a reminder that we can undo damage we have caused and see change. As such, stream restoration becomes a catalyst for revitalizing urban neighborhoods. The Atlanta Tapestry Community near Ormewood Park is seeing beavers, butterflies, and herons flock to its project along Stockade Creek where Atlanta's processed sewer water is released.

In urban area, environmental protection personifies environmental justice. The environment that environmentalist seek to restore is the same one that community advocates seek to protect. It is one environment and we all share it. It's up to the residents and activists to take on this responsibility.

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## Nature Note

The Blackbanded Darter is a small freshwater fish that inhabits the South River. It is found only in the U.S. from Edisto River in South Carolina, south to southern central Florida, and west to the Mississippi River in Louisiana.



Blackbanded Darter - Panola Shoals  
Photo: Jackie Echols

The darter lives in headwaters to medium-sized rivers like the South. Its preferred habitat is flowing water usually over gravel or sand such as that found at Panola Shoals. It feeds on midge, blackfly, mayfly, and caddisfly larvae.

## Upcoming Events

**Rivercane Restoration Project, December 12 and 19, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., Panola Mountain State Park.** Join SRWA for the second year of removing privet from rivercane at Panola Mountain State Park. Volunteers meet at Alexander Lake parking area, intersection of Flatbridge Road SW and Alexander Lake Road, Stockbridge, GA. Check SRWA's events calendar at [www.southernriverga.org](http://www.southernriverga.org) for additional volunteer dates. Questions and to volunteer call Jackie (404) 285-3756 or email [www.southernriverwatershedalliance@gmail.com](mailto:www.southernriverwatershedalliance@gmail.com).

**Monastery Christmas Concert, Monastery of the Holy Spirit, December 12, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m., 2625 Hwy 212, Conyers, GA.** The Atlanta Boy Choir's annual concert in the Abbey Church of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit is a tradition many count on to help them prepare for the coming of Christmas. The concert, now a 36-year tradition, is always unique. Cost: \$20

**Moonlight Over The Mountain, December 19, 5:30 - 8:00 p.m. Panola Mountain State Park Nature Center, 2620 Hwy 155, Stockbridge, GA.** See Panola Mountain by moonlight! We'll hike up in time to see a spectacular sunset with the Atlanta skyline. After the we enjoy moonrise we'll hike down to a lakeside campfire where we'll make s'mores! Cost: \$15

[Find out more](#)

## South River Rainy Day Fund

We cannot depend on regulatory agencies like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Georgia Environmental Protection Division to protect the South River.

SRWA cannot protect the river alone. We need your help!

Please donate \$25, \$50, \$100 or more or whatever you can afford via Paypal at [www.southernriverga.org](http://www.southernriverga.org) or mail your check to: SRWA, PO Box 1341, Decatur, GA 30031.



Fly-fishing on South River in Rockdale County. Photo: Cathy Moll

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**Donate to South River Watershed Alliance via Paypal [Click here](#)**

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