

# Catawba-Wateree Initiative

Scope: Regional/Watershed

Location: North and South Carolina

## CONTACT INFORMATION:

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### Websites:

Catawba-Wateree Water Management Group: <https://www.catawbawatereewmg.org>

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina: <https://www.foothillsconservancy.org>

Conservation Prioritization Tool for Source Water Protection: <https://catawbalands.org/cwi/>

## SCOPE:

The Catawba Wateree Initiative (CWI) connects land trusts, drinking water utilities, energy producers, conservation groups, local, state and federal governments to protect the Catawba-Wateree River from the headwaters in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina (NC) to the coastal plain of South Carolina. The river runs 300 miles to the confluence with the Congaree River and provides drinking water for over 2 million people, hydropower energy, cooling water for coal, gas and nuclear plants, supports recreation, industry and a diverse ecosystem. The diverse watershed contains 5680 square miles and includes the Charlotte metropolitan area, many growing towns and rural and agricultural areas. The growth, development patterns and climate change are challenging this hard-working river. Our work is building a source water protection plan to extend watershed resources for generations.

## COLLABORATIVE FORMATION:

The CWI began with 3 land trusts, Foothills Conservancy of NC, Catawba Lands Conservancy and The Conservation Fund of NC working with the Catawba-Wateree Water Management Group (CWWMG) to include source water protection as part of a long-term water supply management plan. The CWWMG is a 501(c)3 corporation made of all 18 water utilities on the river plus Duke Energy. The members pay dues to support projects that enhance our water supply while protecting the river's ecological integrity. One of those projects retained RTI International to calibrate its WaterFALL model to the river basin and prepare a report that "Quantifies Potential Benefits of Land Conservation on Water Supply to Optimize Return on Investments". The model identifies and prioritizes land areas most critical to protecting water supply. Using 11 hydrologic metrics and sediment loading projections it also quantifies the benefits of protecting those lands. GIS maps are produced to guide land use decisions, acquisitions, easements and best management practices. Our partnerships continue to expand and include:

Katawba Valley Land Trust  
Nation's Ford Land Trust  
Western Piedmont Council of Governments  
Santee-Lynches Council of Governments  
Centralina Council of Governments  
SC Rural Water Association  
Resource Conservation and Development Councils

Soil and Water Conservation Districts  
Carolina Land and Lakes  
US Forest Service  
Local Governments  
State Agencies  
Forestry groups

The CWWMG is updating its masterplan and building an Integrated Water Resources Plan that will include source water protection with an increased focus on non-point source issues and land protection. The CWI is part of the project team developing the plan. A Source Water Protection Task Force including CWI members and utilities was created by the CWWMG and works with the RTI model and staff, analyzes land protection opportunities and is drafting a source water protection plan.

## STRUCTURE/FUNDING:

- The Catawba Wateree Initiative is a project of the three founding land trusts rather than a distinct entity. An executive coordinator/project leader is contracted to lead the project.
- Funding has come from Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation and the EPA's Healthy Watersheds Consortium. Our current funding runs out at the end of 2021 and we are seeking new funding sources for the project.
- Budgeting for the Integrated Water Resources Plan includes funding for CWI's work on the project team.
- Additionally, the Catawba-Wateree Water Management Group has included land conservation funding in their strategic plan and has made three small investments for land acquisitions to date.

## FOUNDING LAND TRUST PARTNERS:

- Bill Holman, Director, The Conservation Fund of NC
- Andrew Kota, Executive Director, Foothills Conservancy of NC
- Sean Bloom, GIS Director and Biologist, Catawba Lands Conservancy
- Vicki Taylor, Program Leader

## WATER CONCERNS:

### Overall Concerns

- Water quality and quantity in both urban and rural areas
- Reliable drinking water supply in a rapidly growing region
- Reservoir temperatures and water levels
- Localized flooding and flashiness
- Localized drought

### Specific Concerns

- Water quality ranges from very good in some reservoirs to eutrophic in others
- Inconsistent buffer and storm water measures among counties
- Need to assemble various sources of water quality data and track changes
- Increased sedimentation, algal blooms and nutrient loading linked to land use change and non-point source pollution
- Aging septic systems
- Lack of reporting by large poultry operations
- The region is growing rapidly with over 114 people each day moving to the Charlotte region alone. Studies done in 2005 indicated that without a change in how we manage our river we would have insufficient water to meet demand. Land use is changing all along the river with increasing and cumulative adverse effects on our water resources. Source water protection will be a critical part of how we change watershed management by including natural infrastructure in the Integrated Water Resources Plan.


## STRATEGIES:

- The key strategy has been to build the partnership with the Catawba-Wateree Water Management Group (CWWMG). With all 18 major water suppliers and Duke Energy, this group reaches the citizens, towns and counties in our 5680 square mile watershed.
- The RTI model and prioritization framework has become a critical tool in reaching out to policy makers and planners. We have developed an online "point and click" version that anyone can use to obtain hydrological and sediment loading data projections based on land use change, as well as the effects of mitigation through land conservation.
- We have run a number of workshops for planners and policy makers, presented at numerous conferences including the American Water Works Association and American Water Resources Association and the Land Trust Alliance.
- We have developed a Land Criteria Worksheet and process to analyze potential land protection areas using the RTI model, local knowledge, and local, state and federal designations and priorities.
- We will work closely with the water quality committee of the CWWMG to compile and share data and objectives and results.

## RESULTS:

- The online tool using the underlying RTI technology is available at: <https://catawbalands.org/cwi/>  
Please log on and try it out!
- Use of the tool has helped in fundraising for thousands of acres.

- Maps have been generated to easily see the “hot spots” and areas to prioritize for protection.
- The CWWMG has made three direct investments in land acquisition for land protection and more are in the pipeline. While these amounts are small, they are a significant advancement in how our watershed is managed. Dues from CWWMG members throughout the entire basin are being pooled to protect land to protect water often hundreds of miles from an individual member’s water intake or discharge. This is a first for our river basin.
- We are members of the project team developing the Integrated Water Resources Plan.
- Regional collaboration continues to grow.



**Information current as of March 2022 Please check with the Collaborative contacts (or website if available) for the most up to date information. To find other source water collaboratives across the U.S. or to add yours to the list, visit the Source Water Collaborative’s [How To Collaborate Toolkit](#)**

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