

Savannah River Clean Water Fund

Scope: Regional/Watershed

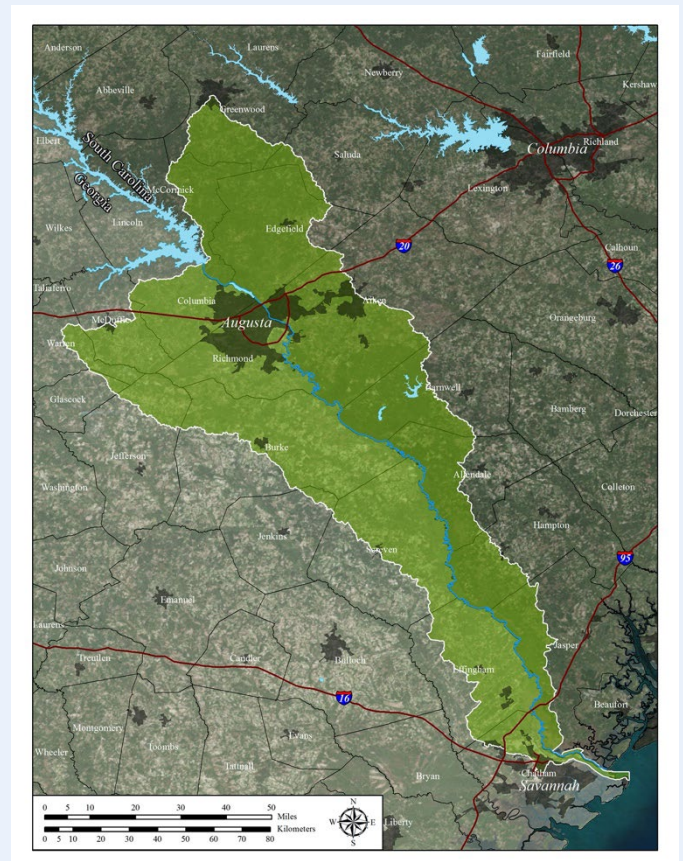
Location: South Carolina and Georgia

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Lisa Lord
Conservation Programs Director
The Longleaf Alliance
lisa@longleafalliance.org
843-909-2343
www.savannahrivercleanwater.org

SCOPE:

- **Geographic focus:** The lower Savannah River sub-basin is a 2.79 million acre watershed in Georgia and South Carolina. The watershed is approximately 77% forested and provides drinking water for over 500,000 people in the region. The **Savannah River Clean Water Fund's** (SRCWF) focus area within the lower Savannah River watershed begins at the Strom Thurmond Dam and continues for 200 miles downstream to the Port of Savannah.
- **Partners:** Beaufort-Jasper Water and Sewer Authority, City of Savannah Utility Services, Augusta Utilities, North Augusta Public Services, Columbia County Water Utility, International Paper, Southeastern Partnership for Forests and Water, U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, local land trusts and conservation organizations, and the GA and SC Forestry Commissions.
- **Mission:** The Savannah River Clean Water Fund is an independent, non-profit that partners with drinking water utilities, industries, and the conservation and forestry sectors to protect the water quality of the Savannah River for communities and businesses through forest conservation.
- **Goals:** The goal of the SRCWF is to leverage water utility funding to ensure protection of 60% of the forest cover in the watershed. Currently 77% of the 2.79 million-acre watershed is forested. Of the 1.67 million acres representing 60% of the watershed, approximately 500,000 are already in protected status.



COLLABORATIVE FORMATION:

- The Savannah River Clean Water Fund was formed in 2014 to provide a basin-wide approach to protecting the water quality of the lower Savannah River through forest conservation.
- The Fund collaborates with its partners to benefit water quality through three primary goals: permanent land protection, improving land management practices, and supporting science and research.

STRUCTURE/FUNDING:

- The original supporting organizations were the five primary water utilities that use the Savannah River for drinking water (City of Savannah Utility Services, Beaufort-Jasper Water and Sewer Authority, Augusta Utilities, Columbia County Water Utility, and North Augusta Public Services), the South Carolina Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, the South Lowcountry Task Force, and the Donnelley Foundation.
- The SRCWF secures public and private grants to support its operations and administrative functions. Land protection is funded in part through contributions by the partner drinking water organizations and state and federal grant sources such as the USFWS Coastal Wetlands Program, SC Conservation Bank, and NAWCA.

PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

- The SRCWF is currently governed by a Board with representatives from upstream, downstream, and both sides of the river.

WATER CONCERNS:

- Water quality issues include emerging contaminants, dissolved oxygen, saltwater intrusion, nutrients, current and future human demands (drinking water and industry) and development. The overall population of the Augusta-Aiken Metropolitan area and Savannah, GA are increasing (the north and south ends of the basin). A substantial portion of urban development is gradual and occurs in disparate areas, removed from the larger, incorporated cities.

STRATEGIES:

- Engage industries, businesses, municipalities, and private landowners in supporting protection of their water supply watershed through financial and other means of support.
- Collaborate with our land trust partners to promote voluntary watershed forestland conservation via conservation easements.
- Establish a sustainable, stable, dedicated funding mechanism for land protection.

RESULTS:

- Established the Savannah River Clean Water Fund in 2014.
- Since its establishment, the SRCWF has led a collaborative effort among water utilities, land trusts, non-profit conservation groups, and state agencies to protect the water quality of the Savannah River. With financial support from local drinking water utilities and other state and federal grant funding, the SRCWF has been engaged in over 19,000 acres of riparian and adjacent upland forest to include bargain sale conservation easements, donated conservation easements and one fee simple purchase of in the lower Savannah River Basin since 2019.
- Developed [GIS-based watershed prioritization tool](#) for land conservation.
- The SRCWF has worked with The Longleaf Alliance and the SC and GA Forestry Commissions to provide landowner outreach and technical assistance through two USFS Landscape Scale Restoration grant to improve water quality through forest restoration and management and BMP implementation.

Information current as of May 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](#)