

Analysis and Public Process



May River Waterbody Management Plan

Analysis and Public Process

The second phase of the development of the Waterbody Management Plan required an analysis of current conditions identified by the Inventory of Existing Conditions, and formulation of Project Goals and Objectives. A Project Advisory Committee (PAC) was established by the Town of Bluffton to assist the Project Team development of goals and objectives and to oversee the analysis phase. The Committee consisted of representatives of stakeholder groups from the area and included representatives of the commercial fishing industry, local boating community, residential and commercial development interests, local biologists, scientists, and informed residents. The PAC also included representatives of the Town Watershed Advisory Committee, Friends of Rivers, Town Council, Town Planning Commission, Beaufort County Planning Department, South Carolina Sea Grant, and DHEC-EQC. The Project Team included members of the Town's Department of Environmental Protection and DHEC-OCRM.

The Project Team held an initial kick-off meeting on May 3, 2007 and the PAC met for the first time on July 18, 2007. In total, the PAC met to discuss and review the analysis prepared by the Project Team eleven times through June 2008.

At key junctures in the plan development process, the PAC and Project Team hosted public information meetings to introduce residents and interested parties to the planning efforts and to solicit feedback. Public information meetings were held four times between October 2007 and March 2008. Feedback from the audience was incorporated into the analysis and plan development.

The Project Advisory Committee was responsible for identifying, discussing, and ultimately finalizing Project Goals and Objectives upon which the analysis of the Project Team was based. The Project Team reviewed the Inventory of Existing Conditions to identify potential Issues, Conflicts and Opportunities in the Study Area which were analyzed against the Project Goals and Objectives. The most relevant and readily implementable Opportunities were then further investigated and presented as the Implementation Strategy to attempt to best accomplish the Goals and Objectives set forth for the May River.

Goals and Objectives

Project Goals and Objectives are developed to give guidance to the analysis, and help to document a "vision" for the use of the River. Within these parameters, and attempting to achieve these goals and objectives, the Project Team and PAC determined broad ambitions as goals, and developed objectives to act as more realistic, discrete, and measurable surrogates that would help to advance the larger goals. Based on input from the public, the Waterbody Management Project Advisory Committee, and information generated as part of the analysis phase, Goals and Objectives for the May River Waterbody Management Plan were developed, discussed and revised. The final goals and objectives are as follows:

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Goal# 1: Protect natural resources of the May River.

- a) *Keep oyster beds open for harvest*
- b) *Document the ecology, flora and fauna of the River.*
- c) *Determine if trends are indicating increases or reduction in health of the system.*
- d) *Increase understanding of breeding habitats.*
- e) *Protect and enhance natural buffers and eroding shorelines.*

Goal# 2: Promote safe and responsible operation and use of vessels in the May River.

- a) *Prepare a boating management plan.*
- b) *Facilitate compatible recreational uses of the May River.*
- c) *Educate boaters and dock owners about the tides and character of the May River.*
- d) *Enhance enforcement on River.*
- e) *Establish rules for moorings.*
- f) *Investigate options for managing personal watercraft use.*

Goal #3: Promote appropriate public access to the May River.

- a) *Protect and enhance existing public access points.*
- b) *Identify the likely need and locations for future public access.*
- c) *Document and protect the attributes of significant May River viewsheds.*
- d) *Protect and enhance public right of ways to the May River.*
- e) *Identify funding opportunities to target for potential future access sites.*
- f) *Clearly establish use priorities for public boat landing and docks.*

Goal #4: Protect existing water quality in the May River.

- a) *Maintain the ORW standards for the May River.*
- b) *Investigate waste management practices in the watershed (including failed septic systems and animal waste).*
- c) *Investigate construction and post-construction stormwater controls.*
- d) *Establish a water quality baseline at the sub-watershed level and develop a threshold model for the May River.*
- e) *Coordinate with County on septic system inspection program.*
- f) *Identify potential land acquisition and conservation easement opportunities.*
- g) *Investigate incentive programs for best management practice implementation for existing lots of record.*
- h) *Document and clarify policies and responsibilities for oil spill response.*
- i) *Coordinate with the SCDOT on maintenance of existing best management practices (BMPs), and to enhance BMPs on new public roads.*
- j) *Evaluate land use for consistency with Clean Water Task Force recommendations.*

Goal #5: Increase outreach and education about the May River.

- a) *Establish what type of information users of the May River need.*
- b) *Develop a programmatic approach to education and outreach.*
- c) *Develop a primer for new residents.*

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- d) *Expand outreach to target boat rentals from outside of the May River.*
- e) *Establish a school education program about the May River.*

Goal #6: Enhance and expand local decision-making to protect the May River.

- a) *Document and understand existing jurisdictions.*
- b) *Determine approaches for inter-governmental management of the May River.*
- c) *Explain the impact of the May River on the Bluffton economy and community character.*
- d) *Examine the local stormwater ordinance to ensure that it results in implementation of ordinance goals and objectives.*
- e) *Review and revise the Waterbody Management Plan every five years.*
- f) *Investigate the formation of a May River Stewardship Program.*

Issues, Conflicts, and Opportunities

After establishing the goals and objectives, the Project Team and PAC analyzed them against what was learned from the Inventory of Existing Conditions. The analysis process resulted in the identification of the issues, conflicts and opportunities which become the basis of all recommendations of the waterbody management plan. The Issues, Conflicts and Opportunities identify recurring points of discussion or interest (issues), elements that may create conflict or stand in the way of achieving the goals and objectives (conflicts), and possible, yet realistic options for overcoming the challenges (opportunities).

Issues

An issue is a point or matter of discussion, debate or dispute, and in most cases, is a matter of public concern. Issues tend to be recurring topics, often involving multiple, interlocking layers of problems. The key for planning is to attempt to not only identify the issues, but also to try to understand their composition and why they persist. The issues will inevitably provide the basis for most planning decisions as a result of the analysis. An analysis of the Inventory of Existing Conditions identified the following as potential issues facing the May River for discussion by the Project Advisory Committee:

1. Increase in population.
2. New residents unfamiliar with River, history, and ecology.
3. New residents likely to increase competition for River access.
4. River located within multiple jurisdictions (Town and County).
5. High seasonal demand for public boat launches
6. Sensitive environmental physical conditions in Middle River and Headwaters.
7. Sensitive wildlife populations occurring in Middle River and Headwaters.
8. Limited documentation of boating use, including uncertain estimates.
9. Limited documentation of public boat landing use.
10. Limited on-water enforcement of State boating laws.
11. Increased need for Spanish speaking interpretation

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12. Planned Unit Development agreements in place with differing standards.
13. Limited number of existing public water access points.
14. Limited parking at existing public access points.
15. Increasing trend in fecal coliform counts in headwaters of River.
16. Heavy natural runoff into Headwaters.
17. Low surface water flushing rate in Headwaters.
18. Unconsolidated water quality monitoring throughout River.
19. Inconsistent water quality monitoring parameters throughout River.
20. Erosion hotspots in portions of River.
21. Historic erosion control structures, some requiring repair or replacement.
22. Competition among uses at public launches and docks.
23. Limited vessel pump-out availability on River.
24. Heavy seasonal boat use at local sandbars.
25. Harvest of shellfish resources by Out of State residents.
26. Use of public boat landings by Out of State residents.
27. No local rules regarding tubing, water-skiing, or SCUBA diving.
28. Multiple regulatory authorities operating within waterbody.
29. Land uses and land use controls differ along the River.
30. Historic water-dependent uses exist which require protection.
31. The character of the community may be changing.
32. The economy of the community may be changing.
33. Aging septic systems in some sections of the River.
34. Characteristics of viewsheds are undocumented.
35. Limited prioritization for land acquisition or conservation near Headwaters.
36. Lack of speed signs for boaters.
37. Lack of public restroom facilities at boat landings.
38. Boating speed is not controlled near sensitive environments.
39. Lack of incentives or requirements for existing lots of record in Old Town to implement stormwater BMPs.
40. Lack of local management or regulatory designation over waterbody.
41. Little clarification of dock lighting requirements or regulation.
42. Limited amount of boater education and outreach.
43. No areas designated as no-wake zones.
44. Changes in land use.
45. Increases in stormwater runoff.

Conflicts

Conflicts are a state of disagreement or disharmony between actions and desired outcomes. These competing interests may result in conflict. As with issues, once the underlying causes of conflicts are identified and understood, developing planning solutions is considerably easier. The following are potential or perceived conflicts that may exist currently or in the foreseeable future in the May River:

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- Potential for increased conflict is present.
- Language barriers may adversely impact understanding.

Goal # 4: Protect existing water quality in the May River.

a. Maintain the ORW standards for the May River.

- Fecal coliform trends data impacts on this objective.
- Lack of data creates a conflict for this objective.
- Monitoring and analysis of trends are sporadic and results are unconsolidated.
- Limited water quality data sharing results in potential for overlooking trends.

b. Investigate waste management practices in the watershed (including failed septic systems and animal waste).

- Waste management practices throughout the River are inconsistent.
- No specific regulation exists for maintaining or inspecting septic systems.
- The impact of failing systems is not quantified.
- The existing waste management infrastructure is not fully mapped.

c. Investigate construction and post-construction stormwater controls.

- Multiple agencies have authority over stormwater management.
- Management approaches, while similar, are not fully complementary throughout River.
- The Town has recently commenced local inspection and management.
- Enhanced coordination is necessary to ensure on-the-ground results.
- Lack of data creates a conflict for this objective.
- Monitoring and analysis is sporadic and results are unconsolidated.

d. Establish a water quality baseline at the sub-watershed level and develop a threshold model for the May River.

- Lack of data creates a conflict for this objective.
- Monitoring and analysis of trends are sporadic and results are unconsolidated.
- Trends data, particularly for water quality, require consistent monitoring devices, including local weather stations and tide gauges.
- Limited water quality data sharing results in potential for overlooking trends.
- Resources to undertake this effort need to be identified.

e. Coordinate with County on septic system inspection program.

- Bluffton currently has no septic system ordinance.
- Management and regulation of septic systems varies between Town and County.
- State manages and permits septic systems and has primary responsibility for installation and safety.

f. Identify potential land acquisition and conservation easement opportunities.

- Land acquisition opportunities have not been well documented.
- Funding for land acquisition is scarce.
- Conservation easement opportunities have not been well documented.
- Planned future land use in headwaters area may present conflicts with objective.

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f. Investigate the formation of a May River Stewardship Program.

- No clear framework currently exists for such a program.
- No leadership committee has been identified to accomplish this task.

Opportunities

Opportunities can be seen as advantageous circumstances or a combination of such circumstances, and it can also be a chance for progress or advancement. Opportunities are options available for a community to promote the goals and objectives of the waterbody management plan towards the solution of issues and conflicts. Opportunities are the way to get planning from idea to action. Having followed a rational planning process moving from inventory to analysis of issues, conflicts and objectives, the identification of prospects to make beneficial changes is highly rewarding. The challenge in this section is to seek creative, yet realistic approaches to addressing the issues and conflicts identified earlier using the resources available to the community.

The possible opportunities presented here are intended to provide some of the possible approaches to addressing the issues and conflicts identified as part of the analysis and may be advanced as appropriate. Additional review of these opportunities by the PAC and Project Team resulted in the identification of Implementation Priorities that would be best to advance first. The following opportunities would, if advanced, also advance the Goals and Objectives of the May River Waterbody Management Plan.

Goal #1: Protect natural resources of the May River.

a. Keep oyster beds open for harvest

- Collaborate with DNR, local harvesters, and scientists to promote a regular stock assessment.
- Reinvigorate the SCORE program in Bluffton to restore reefs.
- Encourage oyster gardening by residents, schools, and community groups along the River.
- Include protection of oyster beds as a common theme for protecting water quality in education and outreach.

b. Document the ecology, flora and fauna of the River.

- Determine what would encourage the scientific community to study the May River.
- Create a bibliography and digital database of all past scientific reports related to the May River.
- Identify a list of research information that could be collected and provide the list to universities to foster student projects.
- Determine what local groups are already documenting the flora and fauna, using what methods, how frequently, and where data resides.

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e. Coordinate with County on septic system inspection program.

- The Town and County should establish a septic system management program that requires routine inspection and maintenance of private septic systems.
- Train and certify local inspectors.
- Prepare outreach material to assist residents with self-inspection and maintenance of septic systems.

f. Identify potential land acquisition and conservation easement opportunities.

- The Town can independently identify possible areas for acquisition and easements within the local jurisdiction in order to create a list that indicates local priorities.
- Acquisition and easements should be sought within the headwaters section of the River for water quality protection.
- Acquisition should be sought throughout the River for future public access and support opportunities.
- Acquisition to support parking demand near boat launches and public access points should be identified.

g. Investigate incentive programs for best management practice implementation for existing lots of record.

- Prepare a list of best management practices that can be installed and the most appropriate place with in the Town and County for their installation.
- Determine likely cost for installation of proposed best management practices.
- Investigate Town purchase of rain barrels for residential use.

h. Document and clarify policies and responsibilities for oil spill response.

- Prepare and publish a guide to oil spill response for the May River.
- Include discussion of scenarios, the appropriate agreed-to response and responsible parties.
- Distribute guide to all local fire departments, and other relevant state and federal agencies.

i. Coordinate with the SCDOT and Beaufort County on maintenance of existing best management practices (BMPs), and to enhance BMPs on new public roads.

- Determine what future DOT projects are currently in planning stages within the Town.
- Begin coordination for future projects as early as possible.
- Provide DOT with copies of the Town stormwater ordinance and design guide.

j. Evaluate land use for consistency with Clean Water Task Force recommendations.

- Coordinate with Regional Plan Committee and Together for Beaufort tasked with reviewing Comprehensive Plans for consistency with the Clean Water Task Force recommendations to ensure that land use is analyzed.
- Revise local comprehensive plan, as necessary, to incorporate recommendations.