

# Factors Assessed in Watershed Evaluations

## Surface Water Quality

SCDHEC's Bureau of Water and Bureau of Environmental Services work to ensure that the water in South Carolina is safe for drinking and recreation, and that it is suitable to support and maintain aquatic flora and fauna. Functions include planning, permitting, compliance assurance, enforcement, and monitoring. This section provides an overview of water quality evaluation and protection activities.

### *Monitoring*

In an effort to evaluate the State's water quality, the Department operates and collects data from a statewide network of ambient monitoring sites. The ambient monitoring network is directed toward determining long-term water quality trends, assessing attainment of water quality standards, identifying locations in need of additional attention, and providing background data for planning and evaluating stream classifications and standards.

Ambient monitoring data are also used in the process of formulating permit limits for wastewater discharges with the goal of maintaining State and Federal water quality standards and criteria in the receiving streams in accordance with the goals of the Clean Water Act. These standards and criteria define the instream chemical concentrations that provide for protection and reproduction of aquatic flora and fauna, help determine support of the classified uses of each waterbody, and serve as instream limits for the regulation of wastewater discharges or other activities. In addition, by comparing the ambient monitoring network data to the State Water Quality Standards, these data are used in the preparation of the biennial §305(b) report to Congress, which provides a general summary of statewide water quality, and the §303(d) list of impaired waters with respect to attainment of classified uses.

There are several major components to SCDHEC's ambient surface water quality monitoring activities, including ongoing fixed-location monitoring, cyclic watershed monitoring, and statewide probability-based monitoring, each designed to provide data for water quality assessment of major water resource types at different spatial and temporal scales. In addition to sites sampled specifically as part of the cyclical watershed activities (W), the ambient surface water quality monitoring program includes several different monitoring station types: Integrator (INT), Special Purpose (SPRP), Summer-Only (SUMM), Random Stream for year ## (RS##), Random Lake for year ## (RL##), Random Tide Creek for year ## (RT##), Random Open Water for year ## (RO##), biological (BIO) stations. Special Study Sites (SSS) are designed to investigate specific activities at a station.

Integrator Sites are fixed-location sites sampled on a monthly basis, year-round, every year, and target the furthest downstream access of each of the 10-digit watershed units in the state, as well as the major waterbodies that occur within these watershed units. Special Purpose Sites are also permanent, monthly, year-round, fixed-location sites, but represent locations of special interest to the Department that do not meet the location criteria of Integrator Sites.

Summer-Only stations are sampled monthly from May through October, a period critical to aquatic life, and characterized by higher water temperatures and lower flows. There are very few Summer-Only Sites as they are intended to track specific reservoir eutrophication concerns.

Watershed stations are sampled on a monthly basis, year-round, during a basin's target year. Watershed stations are located to provide more complete and representative coverage within the larger drainage basin, and to identify additional monitoring needs. Watershed stations have the same parameter coverage as Integrator Sites. Watershed stations are locations with extensive historic monitoring data (e.g. primary or secondary monitoring sites under the previous design). Changes in water quality can be identified by comparison of the new data to the historic data.

A statewide Probability-Based, or random sampling, component is part of the monitoring design. A probability-based monitoring design is a type of a survey design in which the population of interest is sampled in a fashion that allows statements to be made about the whole population based on a subsample, and produces an estimate of the accuracy of the assessment results. The advantage of the probability-based sampling design is that statistically valid statements about water quality can be made about large areas based on a relatively small subsample. Separate monitoring schemes have been developed for stream, lake/reservoir, and estuarine resources. Each year a new statewide set of probability-based random sites is selected for each waterbody type. Random Sites are sampled on a monthly basis for one year with the same parameter coverage as Integrator Sites. The data from those Random Sites located within this basin are included in this assessment.

Ambient biological trend monitoring is conducted to collect data to indicate general biological conditions of State waters that may be subject to a variety of point and nonpoint source impacts. Ambient biological sampling is also used to establish regional reference or "least impacted" sites from which to make comparisons in future monitoring. Additionally, special macroinvertebrate studies, in which stream specific comparisons among stations located upstream and downstream from a known discharge or nonpoint source area, are used to assess impact.

Qualitative sampling of macroinvertebrate communities is the primary bioassessment technique used in ambient biological trend monitoring. A habitat assessment of general stream habitat availability and a substrate characterization is conducted at each site. Annual ambient biological monitoring is conducted during low flow "worst case" conditions in July - September. Some coastal plain streams that have no flow conditions in the summer months may be sampled in the winter (January-March). This technique may also be used in special studies for the purpose of determining if, and to what extent, a wastewater discharge or nonpoint source runoff is impacting the receiving stream. A minimum of two sample locations, one upstream and one downstream from a discharge or runoff area, is collected. At least one downstream recovery station is also established when appropriate. Sampling methodology follows procedures described in Standard Operating Procedures, Biological Monitoring. Only sites described as 'BIO' will collect information on the macroinvertebrate communities used in the ambient biological trend monitoring.

Many pollutants may be components of point source discharges, but may be discharged in a discontinuous manner, or at such low concentrations that water column sampling for them is impractical. Some pollutants are also common in nonpoint source runoff, reaching waterways only after a heavy rainfall; therefore, in these situations, the best media for the detection of these chemicals are sediment and

fish tissue where they may accumulate over time. Their impact may also affect the macroinvertebrate community.

The ambient monitoring program has the capability of sampling a wide range of media and analyzing them for the presence or effects of contaminants. Ambient monitoring data (2002-2006) and trend data (1992- 2006) from 130 stations were reviewed for the Salkehatchie River Basin: 20 from the Salkehatchie River Basin, 43 from the Coosaw River/Ashepoo River/St. Helena Sound Basin, 56 from the Broad River/Beaufort River/Port Royal Sound Basin, and 11 from the Salkehatchie Coastal Frontage Basin.

### ***Natural Swimming Areas***

Although all waters of the State are protected for swimming, some areas are more popular than others and may require closer monitoring. Currently monitored areas are located and discussed in the appropriate watershed evaluations.

### ***Classified Waters, Standards, and Natural Conditions***

The waters of the State have been classified in regulation based on the desired uses of each waterbody. State standards for various parameters have been established to protect all uses within each classification. The water-use classifications that apply to this basin are as follows.

**Class ORW**, or “outstanding resource waters”, are freshwaters or saltwaters that constitute an outstanding recreational or ecological resource, or those freshwaters suitable as a source for drinking water supply purposes, with treatment levels specified by the Department.

**Class FW**, or “freshwaters”, are freshwaters that are suitable for primary and secondary contact recreation and as a source for drinking water supply, after conventional treatment, in accordance with the requirements of the Department. These waters are suitable for fishing, and the survival and propagation of a balanced indigenous aquatic community of fauna and flora. This class is also suitable for industrial and agricultural uses.

**Class SA** comprises “tidal saltwaters” suitable for primary and secondary contact recreation, crabbing and fishing. These waters are not protected for harvesting of clams, mussels, or oysters for market purposes or human consumption. The waters are suitable for the survival and propagation of a balanced indigenous aquatic community of marine fauna and flora.

**Class SB** are “tidal saltwaters” suitable for the same uses listed in SA. The difference between the Class SA and SB saltwater concerns the DO limitations. Class SA waters must maintain daily DO averages not less than 5.0 mg/l, with a minimum of 4.0 mg/l, and Class SB waters maintain DO levels not less than 4.0 mg/l.

**Class GB**, or “groundwaters”, include all groundwaters of the State, unless classified otherwise, which meet the definition of underground sources of drinking water.

**Site specific numeric standards (\*)** for surface waters may be established by the Department to replace the numeric standards found in Regulation 61-68 or to add new standards not contained in R.61-68. Establishment of such standards shall be subject to public participation and administrative procedures for adopting regulations. In addition, such site specific numeric standards shall not apply to tributary or downstream waters unless specifically described in the water classification listing in R.61-69.

The standards are used as instream water quality goals to maintain and improve water quality and also serve as the foundation of the Bureau of Water's program. They are used to determine permit limits for treated wastewater dischargers and any other activities that may impact water quality. Using mathematical Wasteload Allocation Models, the impact of a wastewater discharge on a receiving stream is predicted under critical conditions following R.61-68. These predictions are then used to set limits for different pollutants on the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits issued by the Department. The NPDES permit limits are set so that, as long as a permittee (wastewater discharger) meets the established permit limits, the discharge should not cause a standards violation in the receiving stream. All discharges to the waters of the State are required to have an NPDES permit and must abide by those limits, under penalty of law.

Classifications are based on desired uses, not on natural or existing water quality, and are a legal means to obtain the necessary treatment of discharged wastewater to protect designated uses. Actual water quality may not have a bearing on a waterbody's classification. A waterbody may be reclassified if desired or existing public uses justify the reclassification and the water quality necessary to protect these uses is attainable. A classification change is an amendment to a State regulation and requires public participation, SCDHEC Board approval, and General Assembly approval.

Natural conditions may prevent a waterbody from meeting the water quality goals as set forth in the standards. The fact that a waterbody does not meet the specified numeric standards for a particular classification does not mean the waterbody is polluted or of poor quality. Certain types of waterbodies (i.e. swamps, lakes, tidal creeks) may naturally have water quality lower than the numeric standards. A waterbody can have water quality conditions below standards due to natural causes and still meet its use classification. A site specific numeric standard may be established by the Department after being subjected to public participation and administrative procedures for adopting regulations. Site specific numeric standards apply only to the stream segment described in the water classification listing, not to tributaries or downstream unspecified waters.

## ***Water Quality Indicators***

Water quality data are used to describe the condition of a waterbody, to help understand why that condition exists, and to provide some clues as to how it may be improved. Water quality indicators include physical, chemical, and biological measurements. The current State of S.C. Monitoring Strategy describes what parameters are sampled, where they are sampled, and how frequently. It is available on our website at [www.scdhec.gov/environment/water/docs/strategy.pdf](http://www.scdhec.gov/environment/water/docs/strategy.pdf).

### **MACROINVERTEBRATE COMMUNITY**

Macroinvertebrates are aquatic insects and other aquatic invertebrates associated with the substrates of waterbodies (including, but not limited to, streams, rivers, tidal creeks, and estuaries). Macroinvertebrates can be useful indicators of water quality because these communities respond to integrated stresses over time that reflect fluctuating environmental conditions. Community responses to various pollutants (i.e. organic, toxic, and sediment) may be assessed through interpretation of diversity, known organism tolerances, and in some cases, relative abundances and feeding types.

### **FISH TISSUE**

Many pollutants occur in such low concentrations in the water column that they are usually below analytical detection limits. Over time many of these chemicals may accumulate in fish tissue to levels that are easily measured. By analyzing fish tissue it is possible to see what pollutants may be present in waterbodies at very low levels. This information can also be used to determine if consumption of the fish poses any undue human health concerns and to calculate consumption rates that are safe.

### **DISSOLVED OXYGEN**

Oxygen is essential for the survival and propagation of aquatic organisms. If the amount of oxygen dissolved in water falls below the minimum requirements for survival, aquatic organisms or their eggs and larvae may die. A severe example is a fish kill. Dissolved oxygen (DO) varies greatly due to natural phenomena, resulting in daily and seasonal cycles. Different forms of pollution also can cause declines in DO.

Changes in DO levels can result from temperature changes or the activity of plants and other organisms present in a waterbody. The natural diurnal (daily) cycle of DO concentration is well documented. Dissolved oxygen concentrations are generally lowest in the morning, climbing throughout the day due to photosynthesis and peaking near dusk, then steadily declining during the hours of darkness.

There is also a seasonal DO cycle in which concentrations are greater in the colder, winter months and lower in the warmer, summer months. Streamflow (in freshwater) is generally lower during the summer and fall, and greatly affects flushing, reaeration, and the extent of saltwater intrusion, all of which affect dissolved oxygen values.

### **BIOCHEMICAL OXYGEN DEMAND**

Five-day biochemical oxygen demand (BOD<sub>5</sub>) is a measure of the amount of dissolved oxygen consumed by the decomposition of carbonaceous and nitrogenous matter in water over a five-day period.

The BOD<sub>5</sub> test indicates the amount of biologically oxidizable carbon and nitrogen that is present in wastewater or in natural water. Matter containing carbon or nitrogen uses dissolved oxygen from the water as it decomposes, which can result in a dissolved oxygen decline. The quantity of BOD<sub>5</sub> discharged by point sources is limited through the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits issued by the Department. The discharge of BOD<sub>5</sub> from a point source is restricted by the permits so as to maintain the applicable dissolved oxygen standard.

## **pH**

pH is a measure of the hydrogen ion concentration of water, and is used to indicate degree of acidity. The pH scale ranges from 0 to 14 standard units (SU). A pH of 7 is considered neutral, with values less than 7 being acidic, and values greater than 7 being basic.

Low pH values are found in natural waters rich in dissolved organic matter, especially in Coastal Plain swamps and black water rivers. The tannic acid released from the decomposition of vegetation causes the tea coloration of the water and low pH. High pH values in lakes during warmer months are associated with high phytoplankton (algae) densities. The relationship between phytoplankton and daily pH cycles is well established. Photosynthesis by phytoplankton consumes carbon dioxide during the day, which results in a rise in pH. In the dark, phytoplankton respiration releases carbon dioxide. In productive lakes, carbon dioxide decreases to very low levels, causing the pH to rise to 9-10 SU.

## **FECAL COLIFORM BACTERIA**

Fecal coliform bacteria are present in the digestive tract and feces of all warm-blooded animals, including humans, poultry, livestock, and wild animal species. Fecal coliform bacteria are themselves generally not harmful, but their presence indicates that surface waters may contain pathogenic microbes. Diseases that can be transmitted to humans through water contaminated by improperly treated human or animal waste are the primary concern. At present, it is difficult to distinguish between waters contaminated by animal waste and those contaminated by human waste.

Public health studies have established correlations between fecal coliform numbers in recreational and drinking waters and the risk of adverse health effects. Based on these relationships, the USEPA and SCDHEC have developed enforceable standards for surface waters to protect against adverse health effects from various recreational or drinking water uses. Proper waste disposal or sewage treatment prior to discharge to surface waters minimizes this type of pollution.

## **NUTRIENTS**

Oxygen demanding materials and plant nutrients are common substances discharged to the environment by man's activities, through wastewater facilities and by agricultural, residential, and stormwater runoff. The most important plant nutrients, in terms of water quality, are phosphorus and nitrogen. In general, increasing nutrient concentrations are undesirable due to the potential for accelerated growth of aquatic plants, including algae.

The forms of nitrogen routinely analyzed at SCDHEC stations are ammonia and ammonium nitrogen (NH<sub>3</sub>/NH<sub>4</sub>), total Kjeldahl nitrogen (TKN), and nitrite and nitrate nitrogen (NO<sub>2</sub>/NO<sub>3</sub>). Ammonia and ammonium are readily used by plants. TKN is a measure of organic nitrogen and ammonia

in a sample. Nitrate is the product of aerobic transformation of ammonia, and is the most common form used by aquatic plants. Nitrite is usually not present in significant amounts. Total nitrogen is the sum of TKN and  $\text{NO}_2/\text{NO}_3$ .

Total phosphorus (TP) is commonly measured to determine phosphorus concentrations in surface waters. TP includes all of the various forms of phosphorus (organic, inorganic, dissolved, and particulate) present in a sample.

### **CHLOROPHYLL *a***

Nuisance plant growth can create imbalances in the aquatic community, as well as aesthetic and access issues. Invasive growth of rooted aquatic vegetation can clog boat motors and create disagreeable conditions for swimming and water skiing. High densities of microscopic algae (phytoplankton) can cause wide fluctuations in pH and dissolved oxygen, and can cause undesirable shifts in the composition of aquatic life, or even fish kills. Chlorophyll *a* is a dominant photosynthetic pigment in plants and is used as an indicator of the density of phytoplankton in the water column. The process of cultural eutrophication, from increased plant nutrients, is particularly noticeable in lakes. Continuous flushing in streams prevents the development of significant phytoplankton populations and the resultant chemical changes in water quality.

### **TURBIDITY**

Turbidity is an expression of the scattering and absorption of light through water. The presence of clay, silt, fine organic and inorganic matter, soluble colored organic compounds, and plankton and other microscopic organisms increases turbidity. Increasing turbidity can be an indication of increased runoff from land. It is an important consideration for drinking water as finished water has turbidity limits.

### **TOTAL SUSPENDED SOLIDS**

Total Suspended Solids (TSS) are the suspended organic and inorganic particulate matter in water. Although increasing TSS can also be an indication of increased runoff from land, TSS differs from turbidity in that it is a measure of the mass of material in, rather than light transmittance through, a water sample. High TSS can adversely impact fish and fish food populations and damage invertebrate populations. There are no explicit State standards for TSS.

### **HEAVY METALS**

Concentrations of cadmium, chromium, copper, lead, mercury, and nickel in water are routinely measured by the Department to compare to State standards intended to protect aquatic life and human health. These metals occur naturally in the environment, and many are essential trace elements for plants and animals. Human activities, such as land use changes and industrial and agricultural processes have resulted in an increased flux of metals from land to water. Atmospheric inputs are also recognized as important sources of metals to aquatic systems. Metals are released to the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, gasoline), wastes (medical, industrial, municipal), and organic materials. The metals are then deposited on land and in waterways from the atmosphere via rainfall and attached to particulates (dry deposition).

## ***Assessment Methodology***

The Watershed Water Quality Assessment is a geographically-based document that describes, at the watershed level, water quality as well as conditions and activities related to water quality. This section provides an explanation of the information assessment methodology used to generate the watershed-level summaries. Water quality data summaries used in this assessment are presented in Appendices A through D.

### **USE SUPPORT DETERMINATION**

Physical, chemical and biological data were evaluated, as described below, to determine if water quality met the water quality criteria established to protect the State classified uses defined in S.C. Regulation 61-68, *Water Classifications and Standards*. Some waters may exhibit characteristics outside the appropriate criteria due to natural conditions. Such natural conditions do not constitute a violation of the water quality criteria. To determine the appropriate classified uses and water quality criteria for specific waterbodies and locations, refer to S.C. Regulation 61-69, *Classified Waters*, in conjunction with S.C. Regulation 61-68.

At the majority of SCDHEC's surface water monitoring stations, samples for analysis are collected as surface grabs once per month, quarter, or year, depending on the parameter. Grab samples collected at a depth of 0.3 meters are considered to be a surface measurement. For the purpose of assessment, only surface samples are used in standards comparisons and trend assessments. Because of the inability to target individual high or low flow events on a statewide basis these data are considered to represent typical physical conditions and chemical concentrations in the waterbodies sampled. All water and sediment samples are collected and analyzed according to standard procedures (SCDHEC 1997, 2001).

Results from water quality samples can be compared to State and USEPA criteria, with some restrictions due to time of collection and sampling frequency. For certain parameters, the monthly sampling frequency employed in the ambient monitoring network is insufficient for strict interpretation of the standards. The USEPA does not define the sampling method or frequency other than indicating that it should be "representative." The grab sample method is considered to be representative for the purpose of indicating excursions relative to criteria, within certain considerations. A single grab sample is more representative of a one-hour average than a four-day average, more representative of a one-day average than a one-month average, and so on; thus, when inferences are drawn from grab samples relative to criteria, sampling frequency and the intent of the criteria must be weighed. When the sampling method or frequency does not agree with the intent of the particular criterion, any conclusion about water quality should be considered as only an indication of conditions, not as a proven circumstance.

Macroinvertebrate community structure is analyzed routinely, at selected stations, as a means of detecting adverse biological impacts on the aquatic fauna of the state's waters due to water quality conditions that may not be readily detectable in the water column chemistry.

This water quality assessment is based on the last complete five years of available quality assured physical, chemical, and biological data (2002-2006).

## AQUATIC LIFE USE SUPPORT

One important goal of the Clean Water Act, the South Carolina Pollution Control Act, and the State Water Quality Classifications and Standards is to maintain the quality of surface waters to provide for the survival and propagation of a balanced indigenous aquatic community of fauna and flora. The degree to which aquatic life is protected (Aquatic Life Use Support) is assessed by comparing important water quality characteristics and the concentrations of potentially toxic pollutants with numeric criteria.

Support of aquatic life uses is determined based on the percentage of numeric criteria excursions and, where data are available, the composition and functional integrity of the biological community. The term excursion is used to describe a measured pollutant concentration that is outside of the acceptable range as defined by the appropriate criterion. Some waters may exhibit characteristics outside the appropriate criteria due to natural conditions. Such natural conditions do not constitute a violation of the water quality criteria. A number of waterbodies have been given waterbody-specific criteria for pH and dissolved oxygen, which reflect natural conditions. To determine the appropriate numeric criteria and classified uses for specific waterbodies and locations, please refer to S.C. Regulation 61-68, *Water Classifications and Standards* and S.C. Regulation 61-69, *Classified Waters*.

If the appropriate criterion for **dissolved oxygen and pH** are contravened in 10 percent or less of the samples, the criterion is said to be fully supported. If the percentage of criterion excursions is greater than 10 percent, but less than or equal to 25 percent, the criterion is partially supported, unless excursions are due to natural conditions. If there are more than 25 percent excursions, the criterion is not supported, unless excursions are due to natural conditions. The decision that criteria excursions are due to natural conditions is determined by consensus and/or the professional judgment of SCDHEC staff with specific local knowledge.

If the appropriate acute or chronic aquatic life criterion for any individual **toxicant (heavy metals, priority pollutants, ammonia)** is exceeded more than once, representing more than 10 percent of the samples collected, the criterion is not supported. If the acute or chronic aquatic life criterion is exceeded more than once, but in less than or equal to 10 percent of the samples, the criterion is partially supported.

The total recoverable metals criteria for **heavy metals** are adjusted to account for solids partitioning following the approach set forth in the Office of Water Policy and Technical Guidance on Interpretation and Implementation of Aquatic Life Metals Criteria, October 1, 1993, by Martha G. Prothro, Acting Assistant Administrator for Water, available from the Water Resource center, USEPA, 401 M St., SW, mail code RC4100, Washington, DC 20460; and 40CFR131.36(b)(1). Under this approach, a default TSS value of 1 mg/L is used. Where the metals criteria are hardness based, a default value of 25 mg/L is used for waters where hardness is 25 mg/l or less.

The calculation of the appropriate criterion value for **ammonia** requires the values of several associated field parameters measured concurrent with the ammonia sample collection. Where direct measurements of any of the parameters are lacking the ammonia value will not be used to determine compliance with the standards.

If the appropriate criterion for **turbidity** in all waters, and for waters with **numeric total phosphorus, total nitrogen, and chlorophyll-a** criteria is exceeded in more than 25 percent of the

samples, the criterion is not supported. If the criterion is exceeded in more than 10 but less than 25 percent, sites are evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine if local conditions indicate that classified uses are impaired. Among the characteristics considered are: hydrology and morphometry of the waterbody, existing and projected trophic state, characteristics of pollutant loadings and ongoing pollutant control mechanisms. If the criterion is exceeded in less than 10 percent of the samples, then the criterion is fully supported.

If the conclusion for any single parameter is that the criterion is “not supported”, then it is concluded that aquatic life uses are not supported for that waterbody, at that monitoring location. If there are no criteria that are “not supported”, but the conclusion for at least one parameter criterion is “partially supported”, then the conclusion is aquatic life uses are partially supported. Regardless of the number of samples, no monitoring site will be listed as partially or not supporting for any pollutant based a single sample result because of the possibility of an anomalous event.

The goal of the standards for aquatic life uses is the protection of a balanced indigenous aquatic community; therefore, biological data is the ultimate deciding factor, regardless of chemical conditions. If biological data shows a healthy, balanced community, the use is considered supported even if chemical parameters do not meet the applicable criteria.

#### **MACROINVERTEBRATE DATA INTERPRETATION**

Macroinvertebrate community assessment data are used to directly determine Aquatic Life Use Support and to support determinations based on water chemistry data. Macroinvertebrate community data may also be used to evaluate potential impacts from the presence of sediment contaminants. Aquatic and semi-aquatic macroinvertebrates are identified to the lowest practical taxonomic level depending on the condition and maturity of specimens collected. The EPT Index and the North Carolina Biotic Index are the main indices used in analyzing macroinvertebrate data. To a lesser extent, taxa richness and total abundance may be used to help interpret data.

The EPT Index or the Ephemeroptera (mayflies) - Plecoptera (stoneflies) - Trichoptera (caddisflies) Index is the total taxa richness of these three generally pollution-sensitive orders. EPT values are compared with least impacted regional sites. The Biotic Index for a sample is the average pollution tolerance of all organisms collected, based on assigned taxonomic tolerance values. A database is currently being developed to establish significant EPT index levels to be used in conjunction with the Biotic Index to address aquatic life use support.

Taxa richness is the number of distinct taxa collected and is the simplest measure of diversity. High taxa richness is generally associated with high water quality. Increasing levels of pollution progressively eliminate the more sensitive taxa, resulting in lower taxa richness. Total abundance is the enumeration of all macroinvertebrates collected at a sampling location. When gross differences in abundance occur between stations, this metric may be considered as a potential indicator.

#### **RECREATIONAL USE SUPPORT**

Recreational use support is defined as the degree to which the swimmable goal of the Clean Water Act is attained and is based on the frequency of fecal coliform bacteria excursions. A fecal coliform excursion is defined as an occurrence of a bacteria concentration greater than 400/100 ml for all surface

water classes. Comparisons to the bacteria geometric mean standard are not considered appropriate based on sampling frequency and the intent of the standard. If 10 percent or less of the samples are greater than 400/100 ml, then recreational uses are said to be fully supported. If the percentage of standards excursions is greater than 10 percent, but less than or equal to 25 percent, then recreational uses are said to be partially supported. If the percentage of excursions is greater than 25 percent, then it is considered to represent nonsupport of recreational uses.

### **FISH CONSUMPTION USE SUPPORT**

The Department uses a risk-based approach to evaluate fish tissue data and to issue consumption advisories in affected waterbodies. This approach contrasts the average daily exposure dose to the reference dose (RfD). Using these relationships, fish tissue data are interpreted by determining the consumption rates that would not be likely to pose a health threat to adult males and nonpregnant adult females. Because an acceptable RfD for developmental neurotoxicity has not been developed, pregnant women, infants, and children are advised to avoid consumption of fish from any waterbody where a mercury advisory was issued.

Fish consumption use support is determined by the occurrence of advisories or bans on consumption for a waterbody. For the support of fish consumption uses, a fish consumption advisory indicates partial use support, a consumption ban indicates nonsupport of uses. Fish consumption advisories are updated annually in the spring. For background information and the most current advisories please visit the Bureau of Water homepage at <http://www.scdhec.gov/water> and click on "Advisories." For more information or a hard copy of the advisories, call SCDHEC's Fish Consumption Advisory toll-free hotline at (888) 849-7241.

### **DRINKING WATER USE SUPPORT**

Nonattainment of drinking water use is indicated if the median concentration of the ambient surface water data for any pollutant exceeds the appropriate drinking water Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL), based on a minimum of three samples. Where MCLs do not exist, SCDHEC may use or develop other criteria such that pollutant concentrations or amounts do not interfere with drinking water use, actual or intended, as determined by SCDHEC.

### ***Additional Screening and Prioritization Tools***

Evaluation of water quality data and other supplemental information facilitates watershed planning. Information from the following sources is used to develop watershed-based protection and prevention strategies.

### **LONG-TERM TREND ASSESSMENT**

As part of the watershed water quality assessments, surface data from each station are analyzed for statistically significant long-term trends using the Seasonal Kendall Test Without Correction (SKWOC) for significant serial correlation, using a program written in-house using SAS. Flows are not available for most stations, and the parametric concentrations are not flow-corrected. Seasonal Kendall's Tau Analysis

is used to test for the presence of a statistically significant trend of a parameter, either increasing or decreasing, over a fifteen-year period. It indicates whether the concentration of a given parameter is exhibiting consistent change in one direction over the specified time period. A two sided test at  $p=0.1$  is used to determine statistically significant trends, and the direction of trend. An estimate of the magnitude of any statistically significant trend is calculated.

A rigorous evaluation for trends in time-series data usually includes a test for autocorrelation. The data are not tested for autocorrelation prior to the trend analysis. It is felt that autocorrelation would not seriously compromise a general characterization of water quality trends based on such a long series of deseasonalized monthly samples.

One of the advantages of the seasonal Kendall test is that values reported as being below detection limits (DL) are valid data points in this nonparametric procedure, since they are all considered to be tied at the DL value. When the DL changed during the period of interest, all values are considered to be tied at the highest DL occurring during that period. Since it is possible to measure concentrations equal to the value of the DL, values less than DL are reduced by subtraction of a constant so that they remain tied with each other, but are less than the values equal to the DL. Since fecal coliform bacteria detection limits vary with sample dilution, there is no set DL; therefore, for values reported as less than some number, the value of the number is used.

For the purposes of this assessment, long-term trends in selected parameters were examined using data collected from **1992 through 2006**.

## **Groundwater Quality**

The state of South Carolina depends upon its groundwater resources to supply an estimated 40 percent of its residents. To monitor the ambient quality of this valuable resource, a network of existing public and private water supply wells has been established that provides groundwater quality data representing all of the State's major aquifers (see SCDHEC's Ambient Groundwater Quality Monitoring Network Report for listing of groundwater quality data). A great deal of monitoring is also being carried out at regulated sites with known or potential groundwater contamination (see SCDHEC's South Carolina Groundwater Contamination Inventory).

The ambient monitoring network has been designed to avoid wells in areas of known or potential contamination in order to analyze natural aquifer conditions. Information collected can then be used to identify variations in water chemistry among the major aquifers of South Carolina and give a general understanding of the groundwater conditions throughout the state at varying depths.

Wells sampled in the Salkehatchie River Basin were drilled into one of four major aquifers. The most prominent aquifer, providing over 80% of the groundwater in this area, is the Tertiary Limestone Aquifer or the Floridan Aquifer. The other three aquifers utilized are the Middendorf, Black Creek, and Surficial Sands. All well samples met state standards for Class GB groundwater (see section on Classified Waters, Standards, and Natural Conditions). The ambient monitoring well sites are indicated in the appropriate watershed evaluations and depicted on the watershed maps.

## **Floridan Aquifer**

The Floridan aquifer is the primary source of groundwater for most of the lower portion of the basin. It is composed of solid limestone and is capable of yielding great quantities of water. Wells drilled in this aquifer are similar to those drilled in bedrock in that they do not use screens, but utilize open holes with a solid case up to the surface.

Water from the Floridan Aquifer is easily distinguished from all other aquifers in the state by its high concentration of calcium and its alkaline pH, ranging from 7.4 to 9.0. The hardness of this aquifer's groundwater can approach 2000 mg/l. While many aquifers tend to be low in necessary fluoride, levels in the Floridan often fall within the optimum range of 0.8 to 1.2 mg/l.

## **Middendorf Aquifer**

The Middendorf Aquifer directly overlies the Bedrock Aquifer and stretches from the Fall Line, where it outcrops, to the Atlantic coast, where it exceeds depths of 3000 feet. The Middendorf Aquifer is the main provider of groundwater to numerous private and public wells in the upper portion of the Salkehatchie River Basin. It is generally composed of fairly coarse sands and therefore is capable of yielding considerable amounts of water.

The sands that make up the Middendorf Aquifer are typically clean, containing relatively few heavy minerals or organics. The water is generally leached of most minerals and approaches the chemistry of distilled water. There is a tendency for the water to be soft, acidic, and low in dissolved solids, with locally high iron content. This tendency changes toward the coast due to minute amounts of minerals that slowly dissolve in the water as it ages. As it reaches the coastal areas, the concentration is high enough to affect the water quality; however, the Middendorf Aquifer now lies beneath waters of similar quality and more easily reached aquifers.

## **Black Creek Aquifer**

The Black Creek Aquifer is an important source of water in the central Coastal Plain region of South Carolina; however, only one well in the network utilizes this aquifer in the Salkehatchie River Basin. Due to this lack of data points, the summary will be more applicable to this particular part of the Black Creek Aquifer and may not necessarily apply to the aquifer as a whole. Generally the Black Creek Aquifer consists of sands interbedded with clays and many excess minerals can be present, increasing the chance of dissolved solids and elevated levels of minerals such as fluoride, or iron and other metals. In the study area, the sands are generally clean and conditions are similar to those in the deeper Middendorf Aquifer. Water sampled was soft and acidic with a pH of 6.5, and was relatively low in dissolved solids. As the water migrates towards the coast, there is a trend towards increasing pH and dissolved solids.

## **Surficial Sands Aquifer**

The Surficial Sands Aquifer is a shallow, coastal aquifer that is utilized mainly by relatively shallow private wells. As its name implies, the aquifer consists mainly of sands and is the water table aquifer in most of its extent. Due to its close proximity to both the surface and the ocean, the water is predictably high in dissolved solids, has a widely varied pH ranging from 6.2 to 8.6, and has elevated levels of sodium and chlorine. Amounts of dissolved solids are also widely varied, ranging from 80 to

2400 mg/l. Water pumped from this aquifer typically has an obvious odor and distinct taste, but is still within standards for drinking water. Despite the higher levels of dissolved solids, this aquifer is frequently used because of its proximity to the surface and its decent yields.

## **NPDES Program**

The Water Facilities Permitting Division is responsible for drafting and issuing National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits. Facilities are defined as either “major” or “minor.” For municipal permits, a facility is considered a “major” if it has a permitted flow of 1 MGD (million gallons per day) or more and is not a private facility. The determination for industrial facilities is based on facility and stream characteristics, including toxicity, amount of flow, BOD (biochemical oxygen demand) loading, proximity of drinking water source, potential to exceed stream standards, and potential effect on coastal waters.

### ***Permitting Process***

A completed draft permit is sent to the permittee, the SCDHEC District office, and if it is a major permit, to the USEPA for review. A public notice is issued when the permit draft is finalized. Comments from the public are considered and, if justified, a public hearing is arranged. Both oral and written comments are collected at the hearing, and after considering all information, the Department staff makes the decision whether to issue the permit as drafted, issue a modified permit, or to deny the permit. Everyone who participated in the process receives a notice of the final decision. A copy of the final permit will be sent to anyone who requests it. Staff decisions may be appealed according to the procedures in R.61-72 and the rule of the Administrative Law Court of South Carolina.

The permitting Divisions use general permits with statewide coverage for certain categories of discharges. Discharges covered under general permits include utility water, potable surface water treatment plants, potable groundwater treatment plants with iron removal, petroleum contaminated groundwater, mine dewatering activities, aquaculture facilities, bulk oil and gas terminals, hydrostatic test waters (oil & gas lines), and vehicle wash waters. State Land application systems for land disposal and lagoons are also permitted.

### ***Wasteload Allocation Process***

A wasteload allocation (WLA) is the portion of a stream’s assimilative capacity for a particular pollutant that is allocated to an existing or proposed point source discharge. Existing WLAs are updated during the basin review process and included in permits during the normal permit expiration and reissuance process. New WLAs are developed for proposed projects seeking a discharge permit or for existing discharges proposing to increase their effluent loading at the time of application. Wasteload allocations for oxygen demanding parameters and nutrients are developed by the Department’s modeling staff, and WLAs for toxic pollutants and metals are developed by the appropriate permitting division.

The ability of a stream to assimilate a particular pollutant is directly related to its physical and chemical characteristics. Various techniques are used to estimate this capacity. Simple mass

balance/dilution calculations may be used for a particular conservative (nondecaying) pollutant while complex models may be used to determine the fate of nonconservative pollutants that degrade in the environment. Waste characteristics, available dilution, and the number of discharges in an area may, along with existing water quality, dictate the use of a simple or complex method of analysis. Projects that generally do not require complex modeling include: groundwater remediation, noncontact cooling water, mine dewatering, air washers, and filter backwash. Streams that have been modeled are indicated on the watershed maps.

Streams are considered either effluent limited or water quality limited based on the level of treatment required of the dischargers to that particular portion of the stream. In cases where the USEPA published effluent guidelines and the minimum treatment levels required by law are sufficient to maintain instream water quality standards, the stream is said to be effluent limited. Streams lacking the assimilative capacity for a discharge at minimum treatment levels are said to be water quality limited. In cases where better than technology limits are required, water quality, not minimum treatment requirements, controls the permit limits. The Department's modeling staff develops limits for numerous parameters including ammonia nitrogen (NH<sub>3</sub>-N), dissolved oxygen (DO), and five-day biochemical oxygen demand (BOD<sub>5</sub>). Limits for other parameters, including metals, toxics (including total residual chlorine), and nutrients are developed by the Water Facilities Permitting Division in conjunction with support groups within the Department.

## **Nonpoint Source Management Program**

Nonpoint source (NPS) water pollution, sometimes called "runoff pollution" or "polluted runoff" does not result from a discharge at a specific, single location (or point), but generally comes from diffuse, numerous sources. Runoff occurring after a rain event may transport sediment from plowed fields, construction sites, or logging operations, pesticides and fertilizers from farms and lawns, motor oil and grease deposited on roads and parking lots, or bacteria containing waste from agricultural animal facilities or malfunctioning septic systems. The rain moves the pollutants across the land to the nearest waterbody or storm drain where they may impact the water quality in creeks, rivers, lakes, estuaries, and wetlands. NPS pollution may also impact groundwater when it is allowed to seep or percolate into aquifers. Adverse effects of NPS pollution include physical destruction of aquatic habitat, fish kills, interference with or elimination of recreational uses of a waterbody (particularly lakes), closure of shellfish beds, reduced water supply or taste and odor problems in drinking water, and increased potential for flooding because waterbodies become choked with sediment.

Congress recognized the growing problem of nonpoint source pollution in the late 1980s, and added NPS provisions to the federal law. Section 319 of the 1987 Amendments to the Clean Water Act required states to assess the nonpoint source water pollution associated with surface and groundwater within their borders and then develop and implement a management strategy to control and abate the pollution. The first Assessment of Nonpoint Source Pollution in South Carolina accomplished this purpose. The Department's Bureau of Water manages the ongoing State NPS Management Program, which develops strategies and targets waterbodies for priority implementation of management projects. Section 319 funds various voluntary efforts, including watershed-based

improvement projects, which address many aspects of the pollution prevention management measure and provide education, outreach and technical assistance to various groups and agencies. Most of the projects are implemented by cooperating agencies.

Many land activities can individually or cumulatively contribute to NPS pollution. Eight categories of NPS pollution sources have been identified as contributing to water quality degradation in South Carolina: agriculture, forestry, urban areas, marinas and recreational boating, mining, hydrologic modification, wetlands and riparian areas disturbance, land disposal, and groundwater contamination. There are programs in place, both regulatory and voluntary to address all eight categories.

### ***Agriculture***

In South Carolina, pesticides, fertilizers, animal waste, and sediment are potential sources of agricultural NPS pollution. Agricultural activities also have the potential to directly impact the habitat of aquatic species through physical disturbances caused by livestock or equipment, and through the management of water. The State has laws and regulations that prevent NPS pollution from several agricultural sources including pesticides and animal waste. Funding programs, including those under §319 grants from EPA such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), cost share funds from USDA and are used to implement best management practices that are not covered under regulations. Agriculture land acreage is quantified in the basin-wide and individual watershed evaluations.

### ***Silviculture***

Forests comprise a major portion of South Carolina's land base. As of 2009, 67% (12.9 million acres) of the State's total land area is in timberland. Silvicultural practices associated with road access, harvest, and regeneration of timber present the most significant potential for nonpoint source pollution. Silvicultural activities have the potential to degrade the State's waters through the addition of sediment, nutrients, organics, elevated temperature, and pesticides. Erosion and subsequent sedimentation are the most significant and widespread nonpoint source problems associated with forestry practices. Sudden removal of large quantities of vegetation through harvesting or silvicultural practices can also increase leaching of nutrients from the soil system into surface waters and groundwaters. Most water quality impacts from forestry are temporary or short-lived, can be minimized or mitigated when Best Management Practices (BMPs) are applied, and the site recovers within 2-3 years as vegetation is re-established.

Overall compliance with South Carolina's Best Management Practices for Forestry is 98.6% for timber harvesting operations. Programs to abate or control nonpoint source pollution from forestry activities are primarily the responsibility of the S.C. Forestry Commission (SCFC) and the United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service (USFS), with other agencies having supplementary programs. SCFC provides the results of courtesy exams of forestry operations monthly to both SCDHEC's Division of Water Quality and to forest industries. Impacts from silviculture can be

significant if BMPs are not properly applied. If water quality was impacted by a forestry operation, SCDHEC may institute enforcement action under the South Carolina Pollution Control Act. The United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) also provides technical assistance to government, landowners, and land users. Forest land acreage is quantified in the basin-wide and individual watershed evaluations.

### ***Urban Areas***

Urbanization has been linked to the degradation of urban waterways. The major pollutants found in runoff from urban areas include sediment, nutrients, oxygen-demanding substances, heavy metals, petroleum hydrocarbons, pathogenic bacteria, and viruses. Suspended sediments constitute the largest mass of pollutant loadings to receiving waters from urban areas. Construction sites are a major source of sediment erosion. Nutrient and bacterial sources of contamination include fertilizer and pesticide usage, pet wastes, leaves, grass clippings, and faulty septic tanks. Petroleum hydrocarbons result mostly from automobile sources. From April 2000 through July 2008, statewide population growth was 11.7 percent, while the coastal counties had an increase of 19.7 percent, during the same time period. This continuing development and population growth has the potential to make urban runoff the most significant source of pollution in waters of the State in the future, particularly in South Carolina's coastal communities. Urban land acreage is quantified in the basin-wide and individual watershed evaluations.

SCDHEC has a number of statewide programs that address components of urban NPS pollution. The Bureau of Water administers four permitting programs that control runoff from new and existing urban sources. These include the Stormwater and Sediment Reduction program, Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4), Industrial NPDES Stormwater Permits, and the §401 water quality certification program (see p.27). Additional controls for urban runoff in the coastal zone are implemented by SCDHEC's Oceans and Coastal Resources Management (OCRM) through the State Coastal Zone Management Plan.

SCDHEC's Bureau of Environmental Health's Division of Onsite Wastewater Management administers the Onsite Sewage Disposal System program for the entire State, and oversees the permitting for the installation and management of septic systems. Although not associated with urban land use, this Division permits the septic systems of camping facilities if the facility is not on public sewer. The camp sewage is discharged into a public collection, treatment and disposal system if available, or an onsite wastewater treatment and disposal system (septic tank) is used.

### ***Marinas and Recreational Boating***

As with any human activity, marinas and associated recreational boating activities have the potential to impact the natural environment. Marine sanitation devices and illicit discharges can be sources of bacteria and oxygen demanding substances. Antifouling paints, exhausts, and maintenance activities can be sources of toxic metals, hydrocarbons, and other pollutants. Construction and maintenance activities, such as dredging, can negatively impact aquatic habitats and ecosystems. The physical characteristics of marinas (basin verses open water, high tidal flushing verses low or no tidal flushing, etc.) have the potential to impact water quality. To ensure that impacts associated with existing

and proposed marinas are minimized to the greatest extent possible, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the SCDHEC are responsible for permitting marinas in South Carolina. Within SCDHEC, the two offices that have marina permitting authority are the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (SCDHEC OCRM) and the Office of Environmental Quality Control (SCDHEC Bureau of Water). SCDHEC OCRM issues critical area permits for marinas within the critical area of the coastal zone. SCDHEC Bureau of Water issues permits for marinas at all other locations within the State and issues §401 Water Quality Certifications (see p.27) for marinas statewide. The U.S. Coast Guard and the S.C. Department of Natural Resources are responsible for managing recreational boating activity.

## ***Mining***

South Carolina's mineral production consists of non-fuel minerals that provide raw materials for construction products and a precious metal industry. Portland cement clays (kaolin and brick), sand and gravel, and crushed stone represent the majority of the total mineral value. As of June 30, 2009 there were 615 permitted mining operations in South Carolina totaling 76,546 acres (includes acreage for excavation, buffer, and mine reserves). There were 335.8 acres of mine land reclaimed during the past fiscal year, which brings the cumulative total of mine land reclaimed since the beginning of the mining and reclamation program to 17,271 acres. Surface mining has the potential to generate NPS pollution during mineral exploration, mine development extraction, transportation, mining and processing, product storage, waste disposal, or reclamation. Potential nonpoint source impacts related to mining activities generally include hydrologic modification, erosion and sedimentation, water quality deterioration, fish and wildlife disturbances, and public nuisances.

The Department's Bureau of Land and Waste Management has primary regulatory responsibility for mining activities. Within the Bureau, the Division of Mining and Solid Waste Permitting is responsible for administering and implementing the S.C. Mining Act and its associated regulations. The Mining Act serves as part of an overall management plan for NPS pollution from active mines. Mining activities and locations are identified in the appropriate watershed evaluations.

## ***Hydromodification***

Hydrologic modification (or hydromodification) is defined as stream channelization, channel modification, and dam construction. These activities can negatively impact water quality, destroy or modify in-stream habitat and increase streambank and shoreline erosion. Two State permits, implemented by the SCDHEC, are involved in the implementation of management measures for hydromodification. A critical area permit is required for coastal waters, saltwater wetlands, and beaches defined as critical areas. A navigable waters permit is required for the remainder of the State. Implementation of State policy for dam construction is similar to control of other hydromodification projects in South Carolina, requiring the same State permits and certifications. In addition, dams require a State dam safety permit or a State stormwater management and sediment reduction permit. The Department must also issue Water Quality Certifications pursuant to §401 of the Federal Clean Water Act for dam construction and hydropower operations licensed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

## ***Wetlands***

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency that provides information to the public on the extent and status of the Nation's wetlands. According to the most recent survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Dahl 1999), twenty-one percent of South Carolina is covered by 4,104,805 acres of wetlands. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers implements the federal program for regulating development in wetlands with guidelines established by EPA. The Corps delineates wetlands and determines which wetlands fall under regulatory jurisdiction and require a federal permit for development. At the state level, the primary focus of wetland regulation is through the §401 Water Quality Certification. In accordance with §401 of the Federal Clean Water Act, a certification is required by the state for any Federal permit that may result in a discharge to waters of the state, including wetlands. Applications for wetland alterations may be denied or modified due to the special nature of a wetland or the functions that a wetland provides. Wetland impacts must be compensated for through restoration, enhancement, preservation, or creation and protected in perpetuity. Future development would be legally protected in these areas. Knowledge of areas that are restricted from development due to mitigation or special water classification is useful in planning future development in a watershed. Wetland acreage is quantified in the basin-wide and individual watershed evaluations.

## ***Land Disposal***

Solid Waste Landfills are permitted by the Bureau of Land and Waste Management under Regulation 61-107.19. There are three classifications of Solid Waste Landfills in South Carolina: Class One Landfills, Class Two Landfills, and Class Three Landfills. The landfill classifications are based upon the physical and chemical characteristics of the waste that is disposed in each landfill. There are currently 171 permitted landfills in South Carolina. This total represents 56 Class One Landfills that are limited to disposal of land-clearing debris; 91 Class Two Landfills that receive construction and demolition debris and waste streams that characterize at less than ten times the maximum contamination limits for drinking water; and 24 Class Three Landfill that receive municipal solid wastes and other nonhazardous waste streams that must be characterized prior to acceptance. Solid Waste Landfills are considered point sources of pollution and are thereby required to have BOW industrial storm water permits. Storm water runoff from these landfills may have an impact on the watershed if it is not managed correctly. Regulatory authority over solid waste disposal activities resides with SCDHEC's Bureau of Land and Waste Management. All active and closed Solid Waste Landfills are identified in the appropriate watershed evaluations.

Land application of wastewater or its by-products is a form of recycling because it allows recovery of elements needed for crop production. Land application of biosolids may be beneficial and environmentally sound when applied at the correct agronomic rate. Land applying biosolids can benefit farmers by offsetting the costs of fertilizer and lime while reducing the pressure on existing landfills. SCDHEC's Bureau of Water, Division of Water Monitoring, Assessment and Protection, Groundwater Management Section conducts a program to prevent and monitor groundwater contamination from nonpoint source pollution from land application of wastewater biosolids, solids, animal manures, biosolids, and

sewage sludge. Land application, which is not a discharge, requires a “no discharge” permit (ND). All active industrial and municipal land applications are identified in the appropriate watershed evaluations.

### ***Groundwater Contamination***

All aquifers in the State are potential Underground Sources of Drinking Water and are protected under the S.C. Water Classifications and Standards. Groundwaters are thus protected in a manner consistent with the SCDHEC groundwater protection strategy. Staff hydrogeologists implement a screening program for nonpoint source impacts from pits, ponds, and lagoons associated with the permitted storage, treatment, and disposal of industrial and municipal wastewaters. In cases where a groundwater impact has been identified in violation of S.C. Water Classifications and Standards, appropriate actions will be coordinated with the facility owner to ensure regulatory compliance. The hydrogeologist coordinates with the facility owner to implement source identification, contaminant extent assessments, initiation of contaminant remediation systems, and performance evaluations of corrective actions. In addition to releases from wastewater treatment systems, the staff evaluates releases from other nonpoint sources such as above ground tanks, non-regulated fuel oil tanks, spills and/or leaks. Sites with confirmed groundwater impact will be placed under a Consent Agreement or an Order. SCDHEC’s South Carolina Groundwater Contamination Inventory quantifies the status of groundwater quality in South Carolina. The sites in the inventory are known groundwater contamination cases in the State, and are referenced by name and county, and updated annually.

### **Water Quantity**

Any withdrawal of surface water or groundwater over 3 million gallons in any month is required to be reported to the Department (per the *Surface Water Withdrawal and Reporting Act* 49-4-10 and the *Groundwater Use and Reporting Act* 49-5-10). These data are compiled into an annual report of total water usage in the state (see SCDHEC’s South Carolina Water Use Report). The report also breaks down water usage into categories of interest such as water supply, hydropower, agriculture, and irrigation. In Capacity Use Areas, which are of concern due to the significant groundwater use and subsequent lowering of groundwater levels in major aquifers, withdrawals over 3 million gallons in any month must receive a permit from the Department. Currently, no quantity permit is required for surface water withdrawals.

### ***Interbasin Transfer of Water***

According to the State Interbasin Transfer of Water Act, an interbasin transfer (IBT) of water permit is required when any entity desires to withdraw, divert, pump, or cause directly the transfer of either 5% of the 7Q10 (seven day, ten year low flow), or one million gallons or more of water a day on any day, whichever is less, from one river basin and use or discharge all or any part of the water in a different river basin. The SCDHEC Board is empowered to negotiate agreements, accords, or compacts on behalf of and in the name of the State of South Carolina with other states or the United States, or both, with any agency, department, or commission of either, or both, relating to transfers of water that impact waters of this State, or are connected to or flowing into those waters. The Board is further empowered to represent this State in

connection with water withdrawals, diversions, or transfers occurring in other states, which may affect this State.

In June 2010, Senate Bill 452 or the Surface Water Withdrawal Act was signed into law and it will supercede the State Interbasin Transfer of Water Act after January 1, 2011. It covers all surface water withdrawals that are 3 million gallons per month. Any existing surface water withdrawals will be grandfathered in for the amount of water they can remove at the date the law goes into effect. IBT's are included as existing surface water withdrawers, and are grandfathered in for the amount listed in their IBT permits. Any applications that are administratively complete as of January 1, 2011 will be considered existing users and be grandfathered in for the amount their intakes are designed to pump.

### ***Capacity Use Program***

As authorized under the Groundwater Use and Reporting Act, the Department may declare a capacity use area if the resource is threatened by increasing demand or the potential problems of saltwater intrusion. The Capacity Use Program requires large groundwater users to obtain a permit in capacity use areas. Permits are required for groundwater withdrawn in excess of 3 million gallons in a month. Permit owners are required to report the amount of groundwater withdrawn per month on an annual basis. As part of the Capacity Use Program, the Department monitors a large number of wells to determine the relationship between water levels and pumpage in order to determine regional impacts and evaluate reserve supply. A reserve supply is maintained to offset drought conditions. The Low Country Capacity Use Area includes Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton, and Jasper Counties and all are included in the Salkehatchie River Basin.

## **Growth Potential and Planning**

Land use and management can define the impacts to water quality in relation to point and nonpoint sources. Assessing the potential for an area to expand and grow allows for water quality planning to occur and, if appropriate, increased monitoring for potential impairment of water quality. Indicators used to predict growth potential include water and sewer service, road and highway accessibility, and population trends. These indicators and others were used as tools to determine areas having the greatest potential for impacts to water quality as a result of development.

Watershed boundaries extend along topographic ridges and drain surrounding surface waters. Roads are commonly built along ridge tops with the best drainage conditions. Cities often develop in proximity to ridges as a result of their plateau terrain. It is not uncommon, then, to find cities or road corridors located along watershed boundaries, and thus influencing or impacting several watersheds.

SCDHEC's Strategic Plan for 2005-2010 ([www.scdhec.gov/news/releases/pdf\\_files/Stratpln.pdf](http://www.scdhec.gov/news/releases/pdf_files/Stratpln.pdf)) acknowledges that growth issues are best handled at the local government level. SCDHEC's role is to work with local governments and communities to help them understand the importance of planning for smart growth: buffers, greenspaces, mass transit, subdivision and roadway planning, bike paths and bike lanes, and park and ride lots. SCDHEC can also provide assistance in helping local entities access information and provide consultation on technical issues such as the establishment of buffers and watershed stormwater planning. Many counties in the Savannah River Basin lack county wide zoning ordinances; therefore, there

is little local regulatory power to influence the direction or magnitude of regional growth. The majority of municipalities have zoning ordinances in place; however, much of the growth takes place just outside the municipal boundaries, where infrastructure is inadequate. Section 208 of the Clean Water Act serves to encourage and facilitate the development and implementation of areawide waste treatment management plans. South Carolina's water quality management plans support consolidation of wastewater treatment facilities into larger regional systems.

The regional Councils of Government (COGs) located in the Salkehatchie River Basin include the the Lower Savannah COG and the Lowcountry COG. Growth potential reported in the individual watershed evaluations are updated by the COGs active in that watershed.

# Watershed Protection and Restoration Strategies

SCDHEC's Bureau of Water is responsible for ensuring that South Carolina's water is safe for drinking and recreation, and suitable to support aquatic life. This section provides an overview of other important Bureau programs and strategies applied statewide to protect and restore water quality. The point and nonpoint source controls described previously assist with achieving these goals.

Under §303(d) of the Federal Clean Water Act, each state is required to provide a comprehensive inventory of impaired waters for which existing required pollution controls are not stringent enough to achieve State water quality standards or Federal Clean Water Act goals. This biennial list, commonly referred to as the "303(d) list", is the basis for targeting waterbodies for watershed-based solutions. A copy of the current §303(d) list can be obtained by contacting the Bureau of Water (803-898-4300) or online at [www.scdhec.gov/water](http://www.scdhec.gov/water). Several Bureau programs address these impaired streams in an effort to restore them.

## Total Maximum Daily Load

A Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) is the calculated maximum allowable pollutant loading to a waterbody at which water quality standards are maintained. A TMDL is made up of two main components, a load allocation and a wasteload allocation. A load allocation is the portion of the receiving water's loading capacity attributed to existing or future nonpoint sources or to natural background sources. The waste load allocation is the portion of a receiving water's loading capacity allocated to an existing or future point source.

A TMDL is a means for recommending controls needed to meet water quality standards in a particular water or watershed. Historically, the typical TMDL has been developed as a wasteload allocation, considering a particular waterbody segment, for a particular point source, to support setting effluent limitations. In order to address the combined cumulative impacts of all sources, broad watershed-based TMDLs are now being developed.

The TMDL process is linked to all other State water quality activities. Water quality impairments are identified through monitoring and assessment. Watershed-based investigations result in source identification and TMDL development. TMDLs form links between water quality standards and point and nonpoint source controls. Where TMDLs are established, they constitute the basis for NPDES permits and for strategies to reduce nonpoint source pollution. The effectiveness and adequacy of applied controls are evaluated through continued monitoring and assessment.

Funding for TMDL implementation is currently available with USEPA's §319 of the Clean Water Act grants. For more information, see the Bureau of Water web page [www.scdhec.gov/water](http://www.scdhec.gov/water) or call the TMDL Program at (803) 898-4300.

## **Antidegradation Implementation**

The State's Antidegradation Policy as part of S.C. Regulation 61-68 is represented by a three-tiered approach to maintaining and protecting various levels of water quality and uses; streams included on the §303(d) list are addressed under Tier 1. Tier 1 antidegradation policies apply to all waters of the State and require that existing uses and the minimum level of water quality for those uses be maintained and protected. Tier 2 policies apply to high quality water where the water quality exceeds the mandatory minimum levels to support the Clean Water Act's goals of propagation of fish, shellfish, wildlife, and recreation in and on the water. The Department considers all the waters of the State as high quality waters. Tier 3 policies apply to the maintenance of water quality in waters that constitute an Outstanding National Resource Water and do not allow for any permanent permitted dischargers. Outstanding Resource Waters of the State are provided a higher level of protection than Tier 2, but do not meet the requirements of Tier 3.

Tier 1 protection will be implemented when applying numeric standards included in Regulation 61-68 for human health, aquatic life, and organoleptic protection as follows: if a waterbody has been affected by a parameter of concern causing it to be on the §303(d) list, then the Department will not allow a permitted net increase of loading for the parameter of concern unless the concentration will not contribute to a violation of water quality standards. This no net increase will be achieved by reallocation of existing total load(s) or by meeting applicable water quality standard(s) at the end-of-pipe. No discharge will be allowed to cause or contribute to further degradation of a §303(d) listed waterbody.

The Antidegradation Rules apply to both nonpoint source pollution and for point sources into impaired waters. Many activities contributing to nonpoint source pollution are controlled with voluntary measures. The Department implements permitting or certification programs for some of these activities and has the opportunity to ensure compliance with the Antidegradation Rules. The activities of primary concern are land development projects which are immediately adjacent to and discharge runoff or stormwater into impaired waters.

## **401 Water Quality Certification Program**

If a Federal permit for a discharge into waters of the State, including wetlands, is required, the Department must issue Water Quality Certification pursuant to §401 of the Federal Clean Water Act. Certification is required for permits issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for construction in navigable waters and for deposition of dredged or fill material.

Regulation 61-101 presents administrative and technical guidance for the water quality certification program and requires SCDHEC to consider whether or not a project is water dependent; whether or not there are feasible alternatives which will have less adverse consequences on water quality and classified uses; the intended purpose of the project; and all potential water quality impacts of the project, both direct and indirect, over the life of the project. Any project with the potential to affect waters of the State must be conducted in such a manner as to maintain the specified standards and classified and existing water uses.

As a routine part of the §401 Water Quality Certification review process, the waterbody in question is identified as impaired or not impaired according to the §303(d) list. If it is impaired, the parameter of concern is noted, along with any steps required to prevent further degradation of the water quality of that waterbody.

## **Stormwater Program**

Stormwater discharges result from precipitation during rain events. Runoff washes pollutants associated with industrial activities (including construction activity), agricultural operations, and commercial and household sites directly into streams, or indirectly into drainage systems that eventually drain into streams. The SCDHEC Stormwater Permitting Program focuses on pollution prevention to reduce or eliminate stormwater pollution. The Department has general permitting authority for stormwater discharges associated with industrial activity, including construction. General NPDES permits SCR000000 and SCR100000 for industrial and construction activities, respectively, require permittees to develop and implement stormwater pollution prevention plans that establish best management practices to effectively reduce or eliminate the discharge of pollutants via stormwater runoff. The Construction, Stormwater and Agricultural Division is responsible for issuing NPDES stormwater permits to prevent degradation of water quality as well as for issuing state sediment and erosion control permits for construction sites.

NPDES permits are issued under the authority of the federal Clean Water Act and the S.C. Pollution Control Act. The state sediment and erosion control permits are issued under the authority of two S.C. laws. The S.C. Stormwater Management and Sediment Reduction Act of 1991 addresses construction on land that is not state owned or managed. Currently, NPDES permits are required for: construction sites 1 acre and greater; construction sites in the coastal area that are within 1/2 mile of a receiving water body; and construction sites less than 1 acre on a case-by-case basis where water quality is a concern. Permits are required under the state sediment and erosion control for construction sites that are greater than 2 acres; however, there are exemptions under the law and regulation. The State Sediment and Erosion Program is somewhat duplicative of the NPDES Stormwater Program. The state program created by the 1991 Act can be delegated to local governments. SCDHEC's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) oversees stormwater permitting in the coastal area. The Stormwater Permitting Section manages the program in the remainder of the state.

SCDHEC is assisted in implementing these regulations by many cities and counties that have been delegated to run a stormwater program under provisions of the 1991 Act and/or are owners of Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) and required to run stormwater management programs under the NPDES program. MS4 will identify all impaired water bodies in a Stormwater Management Plan (SWMP). In addition, existing pollution discharge control methods will be identified and incorporated into the SWMP. Procedures, processes, and methods to control the discharge of pollutants from the MS4 into impaired waterbodies and publicly owned lakes included on the §303(d) list will be described in the SWMP. The effectiveness of these controls will be assessed and necessary corrective measures, if any, shall be developed and implemented.

NPDES MS4 permits allow communities to design SWMP that are suited for controlling pollutants in their jurisdiction. There are three population-based categories of MS4: large (population of

250,000 or greater), medium (population of 100,000 or more but less than 250,000), and small (population less than 100,000). Large and medium MS4 have been regulated since the 1990s. Those small MS4 within the boundaries of an urbanized area are called Regulated Small MS4. MS4 NPDES Permits are required for all large, medium, and regulated small MS4. MS4 can extend over more than one 10-digit watershed or even 8-digit river basin as it follows municipal boundaries, so the same permit can be listed in multiple watersheds. The MS4 receiving stream listed in the individual watershed evaluations is the mainline stream of the 10-digit hydrologic unit. The initial receiving source of the MS4 may be a smaller tributary upstream.

## **South Carolina Animal Feeding Operations Strategy**

Among the general categories of pollution sources, agriculture ranks as the number one cause of stream and lake impairment nationwide. Many diseases can potentially be contracted from drinking water or coming into contact with waters contaminated with animal wastes. The Department uses S.C. Regulation 61-43: *Standards for the Permitting of Agricultural Animal Facilities* to address the permitting of animal feeding operations (AFOs). Implementing these regulations and their corresponding compliance efforts are a priority for the Department in order to reduce public health and environmental impacts from AFOs. There are approximately 1,100 active AFOs in S.C. There are no federally defined concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) in operation in South Carolina based on the EPA definition of a CAFO in the NPDES regulations. Using the Watershed Program cycle and the division of the State into five regions, AFOs will be monitored and inspected by region. The §303(d) list will be used to prioritize the inspections. After all the inspections have been made in a region, the Department will move to the river basins in the next region in the watershed cycle. The Department is continuing to work in cooperation and coordination with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the S.C. Department of Agriculture, the S.C. Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the Clemson Extension Service.

## **Sewer Overflow Strategy**

Sanitary sewers are designed to collect municipal and industrial wastewater, with the allowance for some acceptable level of infiltration and inflow, and transport these flows to a treatment facility. When the sewer system is unable to carry these flows, the system becomes surcharged and an overflow may occur. Sewer overflows (SSOs) have existed since the introduction of separate sanitary sewers, and most overflows are caused by inadequate operation, maintenance, and management of the collection system.

The Department encourages utilities to embrace the principals of EPA's capacity Management, Operations, and Maintenance (cMOM) program. Through this program utilities can ensure adequate funding and capacity as well as a proactive approach to operations and maintenance. Those that have implemented cMOM programs have been able to significantly reduce or eliminate overflows from their collection systems. Additionally, the Department has adopted requirements for operation and maintenance of sewer systems in Regulation 61-9, Water Pollution Control Permits.

The Department's approach has been to shift resources historically applied to treatment plant inspections to include evaluations of pump stations and collection systems where problems are suspected. To assist in identifying water quality violations related to SSOs, staff have utilized the 303(d) list of impaired waters to identify waters impacted by fecal coliform or other appropriate pollutants and correlate those with collection systems with incidences of SSOs. The Department's Enforcement Referral Procedures Document is to be used to determine when a collection system should be referred to enforcement for SSOs. The enforcement process allows for the Department to consider actions taken by the collection system such as: timely and proper notification, containment and mitigation of discharge, voluntarily conducting self evaluations, and requests for compliance assistance. The Department will take immediate action where it has been determined that SSOs have occurred and the collection system has not made timely and proper notification.

# SCDHEC's Watershed Stewardship Programs

Public participation is an important component of the Department's Watershed Water Quality Management Program. Benefits to this interaction on the local level include improved public awareness about SCDHEC water programs, and increased local interest and participation in water quality improvement. Described below are some of the Department's water programs that encourage public interest and involvement in water quality. These programs and their contacts are listed on the Department's website at [www.scdhec.gov/water](http://www.scdhec.gov/water).

## Source Water Assessment Program

A safe, adequate source of drinking water is key to development of communities and the health of citizens. The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) places an emphasis on protection of sources of drinking water. As a result of the 1996 amendments to the SDWA, source water protection has become a national priority. States are required to develop a plan for assessment of source waters for all federally defined public groundwater and surface water systems.

The Source Water Assessment Program (SWAP) involves determining the boundaries of the areas that are the source of waters for public water systems. For groundwater systems, these areas are defined using groundwater flow models. For surface water systems, a distance of 15 miles upstream from the surface water intake is the designated protection area (although certain areas within the basin will be segmented as being of greater vulnerability to contamination from overland flow, groundwater contributions to surface water, and direct spills into the surface water). Known and potential sources of contamination in the delineated area must be identified, and the inventoried sources evaluated to determine the susceptibility of public water systems to such contaminants. Assessments must be made available to the public.

Local involvement is a critical factor in the success of the SWAP, and local governments, citizen groups, environmental groups, water suppliers, and the Department must all work together to increase the general public's awareness of where drinking water comes from and how to better protect sources of drinking water. Implementation of source water protection activities largely occur at the local level, and local authorities may wish to base zoning and land-use planning on the source water assessments. The SWAP is a key part of the Department's watershed management approach. To avoid duplication, information gathered from existing regulatory programs and/or watershed protection efforts is utilized (e.g., ambient monitoring programs, TMDLs, etc.).

## Consumer Confidence Reports

The Consumer Confidence Report (CCR) is an annual water quality report required of all community water systems. The rationale behind the CCR is that consumers have a right to know what is in their drinking water and where it comes from. These reports are to educate consumers and help them make informed choices that affect the health of themselves and their families. All CCRs are to include the following basic components:

- the water source, its location, and the availability of source water assessment plan;

- information about the water system (name and telephone number of a contact person, opportunities for public participation, and information for non-English speaking populations if applicable);
- definitions of terms and abbreviations used in the report;
- table of detected contaminants including the known or likely source of the contaminants;
- the health effects language for Maximum Contaminant Level violations and an explanation of the violation;
- information on cryptosporidium, radon, and other contaminants if applicable; and
- educational information that includes an explanation of contaminants and their presence in drinking water, an advisory for immuno-compromised people, the Safe Drinking Water Hotline telephone number, and other statements about lead, arsenic, and nitrate if applicable.

## **Nonpoint Source Outreach Assistance**

The Bureau's Nonpoint Source (NPS) Outreach program is an integral component of the State's NPS management program. The NPS Outreach program supports South Carolina's NPS water quality improvement goals through a capacity building approach. The NPS Outreach program provides outreach resources and materials to communities, organizations and municipalities as they develop their NPS outreach plans. Available resources include a Web-based NPS outreach toolbox tailored for South Carolina specific NPS issues, and consultation in best outreach practices. For more information please call 803-898-4300 or go to [www.scdhec.gov/environment/water/or.htm](http://www.scdhec.gov/environment/water/or.htm).

## **Swimming Advisory Outreach**

SCDHEC tests rivers, lakes and streams all over the State. Sometimes these tests show high amounts of bacteria for some streams and rivers. DHEC puts up a swimming advisory sign where high amounts of bacteria have been found and people commonly swim. The NPS Outreach program uses this as a springboard for awareness of NPS issues and steps citizens can take to reduce their contributions to runoff pollution. For more information on the swimming advisories call the hotline at 1-800-360-5655. Information and tips on reducing NPS can be found on the swimming advisory website at [www.scdhec.gov/environment/water/swim.htm](http://www.scdhec.gov/environment/water/swim.htm).

## **Fish Advisory Outreach**

Based on fish tissue monitoring results assessing mercury levels, SCDHEC and the Department of Natural Resources work together to provide annual fish consumption advisories that tell you the right amounts and types of fish to eat in South Carolina. The advisories particularly focus on providing statewide advice for at-risk women and children. For more information and the most current advisories, please visit <http://www.scdhec.gov/fish>. If you have further questions or would like a hard copy of the advisories, call SCDHEC's toll-free Fish Consumption Advisory hotline at (888) 849-7241.

## **Champions of the Environment**

Champions of the Environment encourages, enables and recognizes youth environmental education projects that develop awareness, promote behavior change or improve and protect our water, air and land. Champions has been rewarding South Carolina's kindergarten through twelfth-grade students and teachers since 1993. Grants and cash awards enabled schools and communities to participate in activities such as protecting nesting sea turtles, reducing a school's carbon footprint, and protecting water quality; all positively impacting the environment and developing young, environmental stewards. Champions is a unique public-private partnership between DHEC, industry partners, and the media. For more information contact the Champions of the Environment coordinator at 803-898-4300 or visit [www.scdhec.gov/environment/water/champion.htm](http://www.scdhec.gov/environment/water/champion.htm).

## **Water Efficiency Outreach**

In South Carolina, a growing population has placed greater demands on water supplies. Reducing household water use becomes part of the solution to maintaining adequate water supplies and protecting water resources. DHEC's Bureau of Water Outreach program is committed to increasing household water use efficiency through the promotion of EPA's WaterSense program. WaterSense encourages water-efficient behaviors and the purchase of quality products that use less water. For more information about WaterSense call the Bureau of Water at (803) 898-4300 or go to <http://www.scdhec.gov/environment/water/or.htm>.

## **Clean Water State Revolving Fund**

Congress created the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) in 1987, to replace the §201 Construction Grants program. In doing so, 'state banks' were created to lend money for virtually any type of water pollution control infrastructure project. Project types include construction of wastewater treatment systems and nonpoint source pollution control. The interest rate on the loans is always below the current market rate. As repayments are made on the loans, funds are recycled to fund additional water protection projects. The vast majority of the SRF funds have been used for the construction of traditional municipal wastewater treatment systems. Because of its inherent flexibility, the SRF program is well suited to accommodate the watershed approach.

SRF loans are available to units of state, local, and regional government, and special purpose districts. South Carolina law prevents loans from being made directly to private organizations and individuals. Local governments such as cities and counties and other units of government such as Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Councils of Government, and Water and Sewer Districts are encouraged to apply for SRF loans for nonpoint source projects. Nonpoint source projects may include construction and maintenance of stormwater management facilities, establishment of a stormwater utility, purchase of land for wetlands and riparian zones, and implementation of source water protection assessments. For more information, view the State Revolving Fund web site [www.scdhec.gov/srf](http://www.scdhec.gov/srf).

# **Citizen-Based Watershed Stewardship Programs**

Throughout the Salkehatchie River Basin, water quality is a common interest among citizen groups. The issues and membership of these groups vary widely. Some of the citizen groups interested in water quality in the Salkehatchie River Basin are described below. To view the most current listing, visit our webpage at <http://www.scdhec.gov/environment/water/shed/org.htm>.

## ***Friends of the Rivers***

Friends of the Rivers is an environmental advocacy group based in Beaufort County with a focus on water quality. Their stated mission "... is to protect the quality of our water resources by providing water quality education and information to residents of the South Carolina Lowcountry as it relates to a community's cultural, social, economic, or scientific concerns." They are a participant in the Port Royal Sound Conservancy, a consortium of private and public organizations working together to target funding and research to the area. For more information, visit <http://www.friendsoftherivers.com/>.

## ***Low Country Institute***

Based in Okatie SC, the Low Country Institute (LCI) works to educate the community on a broad range of environmental issues in and around the Port Royal Sound area. Their educational efforts include events held by their master naturalist. The LCI also collaborates with local and state resource management authorities to implement progressive environmental protection policies. For more information, visit <http://www.lowcountryinstitute.org/>

## ***Coastal Conservation League***

Since 1989, the Coastal Conservation League (CCL) has been working with communities, businesses and citizen groups to protect the South Carolina coastal plain and to enhance the quality of life of its communities. CCL actively promotes the protection of coastal habitats and water quality through legislative action and grassroots citizen involvement. Headquartered in Charleston, the CCL maintains an office in Beaufort (South Coast). Learn more at <http://coastalconservationleague.org>.

## ***Ace Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve***

Located 45 minutes south of Charleston, SC, the Ace Basin (Ashepoo River/Combahee River/ Edisto River) is one of the largest undeveloped estuaries on the east coast of the United States. The ACE Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) was designated in 1992 as a partnership program between the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\)](#) and the [South Carolina Department of Natural Resources \(SCDNR\)](#). The ACE Basin NERR aims to protect the natural beauty, abundant wildlife and unique cultural heritage of the area through long-term research, water-quality monitoring, education and coastal stewardship. For more information, visit <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/marine/NERR/>.