

ATLANTA WATERSHED LEARNING NETWORK



AWLN Training Continues: A Virtual Learning Experience In 2020!

The AWLN 2020 course was changed to an online class for the safety of all participants. While virtual learning has some drawbacks, the overall experience proved successful in advancing knowledge and community advocacy skills among class members. An added benefit for some participants was an introduction to video conferencing. Here are selected comments from class participants regarding their learning experience:

“What I actually learned is how intersectional the environment is with social justice.”

- John Sheffield, 2020 Graduate

“I actually learned that there’s a lot we can do to eliminate or minimize flooding... we need to create change agents and build ambassadors because a lot of people are not aware of the political process and how water runoff from newly constructed buildings impacts us.”

-Franklin Mack, 2020 Graduate

“Learning about the water cycle and environmental justice caused me to realize I’m more passionate about access to water and water-related equity than I thought.”

-Eboni Green, 2020 Graduate

“My training experience with AWLN was eye opening for me. I would recommend this training to all residents.”

- Catherine Prather, 2020 Graduate

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“Supporting community members to advocate for sustainable, green solutions to address urban stormwater and flooding issues”

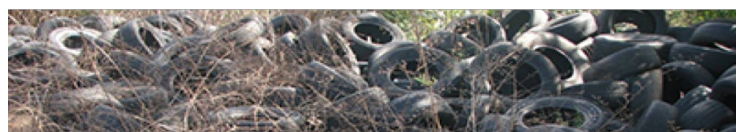
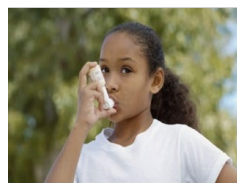
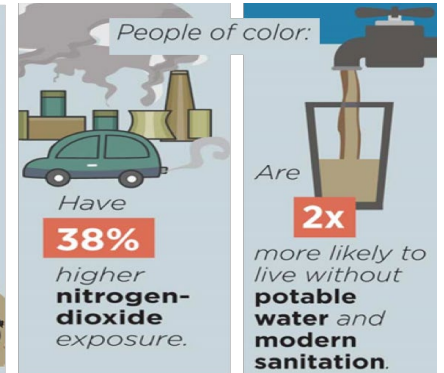
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Race is the most significant predictor of a person living near contaminated air, water, or soil.

56%

of the population near **toxic waste sites** are people of color.



Expanding Our Reach:



AWLN Influences Programming Across The Southeast

By Keshi Satterwhite

A 2019 AWLN meeting with partners from around the southeast discuss the power of connectivity within environmental education. Partners represented organizations in Durham, NC; Baltimore, MD; Raleigh, NC; and Atlanta, GA. Southeastern partners include Keshi Satterwhite, Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association (ECWA); Rodette Jones, Greater BayBrook Alliance (GBA); and Amin Davis (Partners for Environmental Justice).

The Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association (ECWA) is a nonprofit working to restore a healthy, living creek that connects people and nature in Durham, North Carolina. We protected our first six acres in 1999. Since then, we have acquired more than 450 acres, including five nature preserves that we manage for public recreation, water quality, and native plant and habitat restoration.

ECWA created the first version of The Watershed Academy in the summer of 2019 as a one-day event. The event specifically helped young adults ages 8-16 understand the importance of preventing polluted stormwater runoff and education about their local urban watershed.

To expand Durham's engagement efforts and learn new outreach strategies, The Conservation Fund extended an invitation for ECWA and two other partners to visit Atlanta to audit a program.

ECWA and other partners visited Atlanta and observed the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network's (AWLN) graduation ceremony. What I didn't know at the time is this experience would be a game-changer for how we craft urban watershed planning and stewardship programming in Durham.

As an observer of the AWLN ceremony, we saw participants presenting their service-learning Champion Projects, sharing what they've learned and what they plan to do next upon completion of the program. What a powerful experience,

watching community members become change agents and lead stewardship projects in their neighborhoods. I found myself in awe of one member of the AWLN, Ms. Ethel. You see, Ms. Ethel is an excellent example of empowering the community by providing the necessary resources and tools and watching them lead the changes they want to see in their communities.

Every time I visit Atlanta, I leave feeling re-energized and believing I can take on the world of environmental inequalities, and observing the AWLN fueled that passion. The AWLN guided our thinking around the next version of The Watershed Academy and how to build a comprehensive program to reach marginalized communities in Durham.

We expanded The Watershed Academy to a four-month program, which started on September 19, 2020, wrapped-up on December 12, 2020. The four-month Watershed Academy focuses on community residents who desire to become a steward and advocate for Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) and Environmental Justice (EJ) in their neighborhoods. Participants of The Watershed Academy commitment to completing a project that addresses the application of Green Infrastructure related to flooding and water quality issues in their watershed. In 2021, The Watershed Academy offers four and two-month programs and developing a workforce development component to address a community's needs.

News from the Watersheds

- On October 22, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), along with Proctor Creek residents and stakeholders, announced the launch of the Proctor Creek Watershed Story Map, an easy-to-use interactive online tool that can be used to help community members engage as stewards of their watershed. The story map can be accessed on the EPA's website [here](#).
- The EPA is testing up to 1,000 properties in the English Avenue and Vine City communities after elevated levels of lead was found in the soil last year. If contaminated soil is present it will be removed by the EPA and replaced with clean soil.
- Work was completed by the Georgia Department of Transportation on two bioretention cells, or rain gardens, last Spring. The project is located in downtown Atlanta near highways I75-85 and I20. The landscaped rain gardens will infiltrate 750,000 gallons of stormwater runoff from the

highways annually. The project is part of a larger effort involving a partnership of local community leaders.

- The newly formed Intrenchment Creek Community Stewardship Council held a kickoff meeting on November 21. Jason Dozier and Chris Lemon, AWLN graduates, serve as co-chairs of the Council whose primary mission is to restore, revitalize and protect the ecological health of south Atlanta communities.
- The Peoplestown community experienced major flooding on July 2. Rain water mixed with sewage spewed out of manholes and covered streets, backyards and basements.
- The Post Development Stormwater Ordinance was passed by Atlanta City Council on November 17 without restoring the extended detention language which would have tightened flood control measures.

Let's Fight for Environmental Justice On The Westside of Atlanta

By Eri Saikawa, Emory University Associate Professor | Dept of Environmental Sciences & Soil Investigation Team Lead

In 2018, my lab became interested in urban agriculture. That was also when the City of Atlanta was promoting AgLanta to expand urban agriculture. It is a wonderful idea to have fresh produce in the neighborhood but when we found out that there was no regulation to test the soil for contaminants before growing produce for sale, we were concerned. We started measuring the lots planned for urban farming and we found high soil lead concentrations in the Westside of Atlanta.

Emory HERCULES Center was instrumental in putting us in touch with then-director of the Historic Westside Gardens (HWG), Gil Frank. Together with the members of the HWG, my lab members sampled the soil in home gardens and community gardens in the Westside of Atlanta. Out of the 12 we measured, there were three that had high levels of lead. One of the lots was used for children's garden and that made us all the more concerned. With HWG, we hosted the Tomato festival in the summer in the neighborhood and the current HWG executive director Rosario Hernandez brought what she thought to be the potential source of the contamination in the neighborhood. EPA colleague Timothy Frederick who had the instrument found out on the spot that it had more than three times higher than the EPA threshold value for lead concentration. These were slag pieces – industrial waste most likely from smelting in the past – and they were being dumped as a foundation of the Westside neighborhood.

EPA was very responsive and they took the necessary measure right away to have this problem elevated so that this issue will be dealt with properly. EPA started the investigation with approximately 60 lots at first and based on the rate of contamination they find in the area, they

expanded it to include 1068 lots. We however already found that there are lots outside of [this current boundary](#) that have higher than the EPA regional screening levels of 400 ppm (mg/kg).

There are several things that are very essential. First, if you live in the boundary, it is important that the EPA comes to test the soil. They will do this for free and if they find that your soil lead level is higher than their threshold, they will clean it up for free. Second, if you are outside of the boundary, please take part in the [Community Science SoilSHOP](#) in the spring to test your soil lead levels. SoilSHOP stands for Soil Screening, Health, Outreach and Partnership. The Community Science soilSHOP is a community soil screening event that aims to raise awareness about, and protect people from, the hazards of lead. Community members, scientists, and health educators work together to reduce and prevent exposures to lead in soil. We just had one this fall and collected the record number of soils in Georgia. We will continue this in the spring and we welcome you to take part! Third, if you have children, please make sure that you test them for their blood lead levels. There are no known safe levels of lead for children and it is extremely important that we make sure that children are not exposed. The best way to determine that is to do a simple blood test. Within Fulton county, [these](#) are the places where you can test your children for lead exposure.

This is an environmental justice issue and we need to fight it to end systematic racism. Unless we understand the issue and work together, the situation will not improve. I hope that we can make sure that we have healthy environment for all children to thrive. Let's fight for social justice, climate justice, and environmental justice in the Westside together.



AWLN Helps Me Fight For Environmental Justice in My Community

By Bertha Darden

I have learned Gentrification is the process of rebuilding and restoring a community, accompanied by positive outcomes for current residents. The City of Atlanta's 2013 Stormwater Ordinance requires new construction projects to capture and manage the first 1-inch of stormwater onsite. This has resulted in more than 5,500 installations on private property and the capture of more than 1.1 billion gallons of stormwater to date.

Because of my Atlanta Watershed Network (AWLN) training I feel that I have the tools to ask questions that promote equity and positive outcomes for current residents when new development projects are proposed in my community.

AWLN teaches skills that help community leaders like me fight for environmental justice. This learning comes at a time when my neighbors and I are facing imminent eviction from our homes in Atlanta by eminent domain. As is the case with many in-town Atlanta neighborhoods there has been significant flooding in Peoplestown.

In 2013, the City of Atlanta commissioned an independent engineering firm to assess the flooding and make some recommendations for mitigating it. In its report, the firm identified the parking lots surrounding Turner Field as the source of the flooding. There are 3 Sub-basins: Sub-basin 1 drains to the Crew Street trunk line, Sub-basin 2 drains to the Loyd Street trunk line along Central Avenue, and Sub-basin 3 drains to the Connally Street trunk line. All 3 trunk lines meet at Atlanta Avenue which is plagued with persistent flooding according to maps by Sherwood Design Engineers.

The independent engineers suggested the creation of a park and pond on the parking lots around the stadium to capture the water upstream from the area where the water pools on Atlanta Ave. In the study The City of Atlanta

Flooding in the Intrenchment Creek Watershed picture courtesy of Bertha Darden.



characterized these recommendations as "infeasible" and moved forward with a plan to demolish a block of 27 homes in the heart a historic black neighborhood: Peoplestown.

Despite emails from the City's engineer over the project advising of the lack of "technical data supporting the land acquisition and proposed design," the City demolished more than 20 homes and in October 2016 it sued four (4) residents to take their property by eminent domain. My family was one of those residents.

The legal question at the center of the City's action is whether the property is "necessary." The answer to that question requires consideration of the available engineering at the time of the taking. The City of Atlanta has failed to produce engineering studies showing that at the time it began demolishing homes in 2014 the takings were necessary. Any evidence it produces to the contrary, after the fact, is irrelevant. The remaining residents have been aggressively defending themselves against the City's unlawful actions in court, and they have reached out to Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, who inherited this matter, to ask her to drop the lawsuits against them.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



Wading in the Water

My Community/Business Connection Project

By Eboni Green

Not enough community members are aware of the water and environmental resources that are available to them for various uses. Ignorance of these resources results in an undereducated population regarding the rights of community members as those rights relate to major infrastructure and development projects in and around their communities.

This project will increase awareness surrounding a community's access to clean water, the work that goes into maintaining that access, and the rights & responsibilities of communities to protect their access to that water from unnecessary, undesirable, and/or potentially harmful land development. This education will also highlight career opportunities in the wide world of water.

The knowledge I've gained from AWLN has prompted me to do take away three top ideals:

I will leverage the relationships I have with industry leading, multi-billion dollar engineering and planning firms to take advantage of the money they have in their corporate responsibility programs to put those funds behind the education of community members.

This is especially true of companies like Jacobs Engineering and their global strategy called "TogetherBeyond". Their strategy is aimed at driving an inclusive culture that engages and empowers their staff to be engaged at every level of their business.

They are now executing a "Action Plan for Advancing Justice and Equality" as a corporate reaction to the atrocities witnessed within the Black community around the United States in the summer of 2020. The heart of that strategy is to create better opportunities and outcomes for a historically marginalized group.

Other engineering firms my company works with use language that might suggest that they have a heart for the communities their work ultimately impacts. I will call them to the carpet on that language, and offer them the opportunity to create real, lasting change. The ultimate goal is to use their influence, revenue, and power to impact projects at the local level.

I will continue to build awareness around water so that more communities understand that they have access to water, the work that it takes to provide the water, and why some communities do not have access to that water. Community members will also become aware of how to advocate for their access to not only water, but also healthier living through green spaces.

When my work in water started five years ago, it started with an incredible local utility - Clayton County Water Authority. There, I met a woman who looked just like me and the scientist responsible for all of the treatment plants held by CCWA. My mind was blown. Even as an adult, I'd

never considered that this was a career path for me.

This is a career path that more people, especially those from historically marginalized ethnicities or communities, should consider. I am excited to share this possibility with others.

The answer to the following question will support my ultimate goal to create and systematize a method of awareness that educates and empowers. How do the projects my company is working on, the access I have to large corporations, and the education I now have access to work together?

My approach is to:

- Research water-focused non-profit organizations to understand their pain points surrounding strategic engagement.
- Use available data to analyze potential impact of increased engagement on development projects that have negative impact on marginalized communities.
- Partner with international planning and engineering firms to develop plans that have minimal impact on marginalized communities and maximum impact on positive health outcomes in those same communities.

My project will:

- Empower more community members to become organized leaders who have specific roles in spreading awareness.
- Document the work done at the community level and leveraging the platforms of global environmental organizations, along with those of our corporate partners to inform the public.
- Leverage the ongoing conversations in various communities to build a peer-mentoring platform that allows for communication across related topics.

My next step is to leverage my company's relationships with global planning and engineering firms to spend their corporate responsibility dollars on programs that support the environmental health of marginalized communities and introduce members of those communities to careers in the water sector.

I am excited to see where this road takes me. I am most excited for the opportunity to talk about and give people access and instruction towards healthier, more equitably-lived lives.



My AWLN Learning Experience

By Alfred Tucker

A green roof is not the vegetation that sometimes grows in the gutters of my house.

One of the first revelations I had as a cohort of the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network (AWLN) is how little I knew or understood about the water cycle and the misconceptions I've held all my life, although the idea of a gutter garden was never one of them.

When my family moved to Hunter Hills the area was outside Atlanta city limits. At that time the streets were unpaved, outhouses were used and residents raised hogs and chickens. I was 7 years old when we arrived, having moved from a housing project. The woods were all around us and I became a regular explorer. I discovered all types of trees, found nearby streams and caught tadpoles in the creek. Proctor Creek, that is. I was in paradise and a lifelong love of Nature was born. I cherish the memory of those childhood days; they have stayed with me all these years like a dreamscape, with Proctor Creek running through it.

After hearing about AWLN I decided to participate because of my lingering curiosity from childhood about creeks and aquatic wildlife. I saw this as an opportunity to finally get answers to my questions: where does Proctor Creek begin, where does it end, how do fish get in it? I knew I would learn about Atlanta's creeks and streams but I didn't anticipate learning about environmental problems involving flooding and pollution and how these problems affect marginalized communities.

The AWLN class provided a good foundation in the basics of the water cycle and all the conditions, both good and bad, that affect it. Most of this was new information for me and other class participants. To enhance our learning, we were encouraged to share this knowledge with our families and neighbors. Knowledge is power, but only if you use it. Remember that Dr. Noibi said that one of the requirements is for each participant to transfer learning to others in their community – be a change agent.

I recently had an opportunity to put into practice some of the strategies for organizing and influencing authority that we learned in class. Residents living in the Capitol View community were concerned about hazardous substances being dumped into nearby Perkerson Creek. They contacted Eco-Action Atlanta for help in addressing the problem. I was able to meet with the residents and assist in the creation of a community organization focused on protecting the creek. A community action plan was developed and key allies were identified. The community group worked with city officials and environmental organizations to identify and initiate legal action against the perpetrator of the illegal dumping. An organized community group is now in place to monitor Perkerson Creek and protect its health.

“When I step out I want to have knowledge walking with me.” -Alfred Tucker, 2020 Graduate

The NKM principle (Notice/Keep/Motivate) that's taught in class helps me focus and act on environmental issues. As I learn about the water cycle and the environment, I make a conscious effort to recognize and investigate actual environmental threats in the community at the time they occur. For example, if the street is flooded after heavy rain I look to see what caused the flooding. I notice the storm drains. Are they clogged? Has a nearby creek overflowed? Are residences flooded?

A major flood event occurred in the Peoplestown community last July. Flooding caused by an outdated sewer system is a recurring problem in that area, exposing residents to health issues and damage to property. Marginalized communities need equitable solutions to environmental problems, like flooding. AWLN has equipped me with knowledge I can use to help Atlanta communities fight for environmental equity.

In the words of Steven Amstrup of Polar Bears, Int'l: “People are not just observers of ecology. We're participants in it. Every time you step out the door of your house you have some influence and you have some ability to influence the world.”



Mr. Tucker shared photographs of green infrastructure with the class that he spotted along White Street in the West End community. He noted, “the bioswales are situated in a manner to catch rainwater runoff from huge parking lots on the hill above them.”



A Virtual AWLN Experience

By Charlene Johnson

I remember being asked to consider joining a class – related to watershed management. No other details were provided. As a life-long learner, my response was: ‘Sure, when do we meet?’ Little did I know that the pandemic would interrupt the traditional class format. We weren’t even sure we’d be able to hold class. Field trips would most certainly be out of the question. In a mad scramble, the class leaders announced that the class would be held in a different format: virtually.

The first class started late and ended late. The Study Guide only contained two out of six chapters and we built it as we went along. The only way to ‘see’ each other was via Zoom. But do you know what? ... We all held it together and made it work. During class we exchanged experiences as we learned about watersheds, rivers and polluted creeks. Our journey extended to discussions of flooding, equality and social injustice. We spoke of community history, infrastructure (both green and gray). The distance learning was a success story ready for telling.

I’ve shared my story with friends and family who were amazed to learn that Proctor Creek flows under the city of Atlanta and the Flint River flows under the famous Hartsfield-Jackson Airport. Some are still waiting to see the litter-gitter catchment system that is only about a mile from my home. My neighbors don’t know it yet, but they will be part of my Champion Project!

We’ve learned that we ALL have a part to play in the combined story of Atlanta and its watersheds. Thank you, Atlanta Watershed Learning Network (AWLN) and the Proctor Creek Restoration Project for the opportunity to continue the watershed journey!

Meet Our Instructors!

Darryl Haddock
Environmental Education Director
West Atlanta Watershed Alliance



Darryl is one of the primary coordinators of forestry education at the Outdoor Activity Center, a 26-acre nature preserve in the heart of Southwest Atlanta. Darryl has a passion for and commitment to youth education, having chaired the scholarship program for his fraternity and facilitated conflict resolution workshops for middle school students.

Dr. Erica Holloman
Climate and Equity Program Manager
West Atlanta Watershed Alliance



Dr. Holloman’s areas of expertise are in marine science, environmental risk assessments (human and ecological), community-based participatory research, participatory action research, and environmental justice. She served as the Coalition Coordinator for the Southeast CARE Coalition and on the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council. She established Ayika Solutions, Inc., a family-owned environmental consulting firm.

Dr. Yomi Noibi
Executive Director
Environment Community Action



Dr. ‘Yomi’ as he is affectionately called, is a life-long environmental science educator, community organizer, and advocate of equity and environmental justice. He leads ECO-Action’s work in building community knowledge and power in neighborhoods with vulnerable and marginalized populations. In 2019, he received the Emma Darnell Environmental Justice award from the Fulton County Citizens Environmental Commission.

Proctor Creek – Downstream Intervention

Litter Catchment System



Proctor Creek - Current

Trash and vegetation barriers to healthy environment and water flow.

ATLANTA WATERSHED
LEARNING NETWORK

“The distance learning was a success story ready for telling.”

-Charlene Johnson,
2020 Graduate



The Brownfields Around Us

By Alfred Tucker



Photo Courtesy of Invest Atlanta

Brownfields are found everywhere. Many of us drive or walk past them every day. They're found in urban, suburban and rural communities.

Brownfields are idle or abandoned commercial or industrial sites that can't be used because they are too contaminated to be redeveloped without cleanup. According to the EPA, typical brownfield contaminants include petro hydrocarbons, lead, asbestos, PCB's, creosote, cadmium and arsenic.

The United States General Accounting Office estimates there are as many as 425,000 brownfields in the United States. Generally, brownfield sites exist in a city's industrial section, on locations with abandoned factories or commercial buildings, or other previously polluting operations like steel mills, refineries or landfills. Some brownfield sites aren't even industrial, such as abandoned gas stations with buried tanks and long-ago dry cleaners that used a highly volatile chemical that easily migrated through concrete or asphalt parking lots impacting the site's underlying soil and ground water.

Brownfield sites are increasingly being developed for several reasons. First, most of them are in prime locations with easy access to transportation and abundant utilities. The communities in which brownfields sites are located are often eager to add jobs for local residents. Lastly, the Environmental Protection Agency offers incentives and programs to offset the costs associated with cleaning up and renewing the sites.

Brownfield development may have environmental justice implications, such as who lives near brownfield sites and which sites are cleaned up first; whether lowering cleanup standards for brownfield development is safe for human health; whether brownfield development can provide

economic benefits without any adverse consequences of development to local residents; and how public participation should be included in the process.

In many brownfield redevelopment projects, community groups are frequently left out of the process. Once the cleanup process has started it is too late for the community to have significant input. To be effective, the community has to get involved early, before a developer has invested heavily in a plan of action for the site. The community's

role is vital in giving voice to the problem and collaborating with government and nonprofit organizations in land use planning.

Columbus Ward is a resident advocate of the Peoplestown Community Coalition and an Atlanta Watershed Learning Network cohort. Mr. Ward is concerned about the brownfields in his community being properly cleaned up before new development construction begins. He has good reason to be concerned. He said the city of Atlanta built a playground on top of an old landfill in his community several years ago without first removing debris

and contaminants. Later, a little girl was burned as she slide down a sliding board in the playground. Her injuries were caused by methane gas seeping up from the ground. Mr. Ward wants residents to have access to information about brownfield cleanup in Peoplestown in order to ensure it's done properly. "Right now, I don't see a clear path for being able to review any documents," Mr. Ward said. He will continue to seek a way for his community to obtain this information.

Additional information concerning the role of community organizations in brownfield remediation may be found in Brownfields Redevelopment Toolbox For Disadvantaged Communities (2008) by Evans Paull.



Columbus Ward

Restoring Our Hidden Rivers

Revisiting Urban Waterways with New Eyes

By Jenny Hoffner VP, River Conservation Strategies,
American Rivers

Note: The original version of this article was published by Nonprofit Quarterly March 3, 2020 and can be found [here](#).

Many of our world's modern urban rivers are [hidden, a place apart](#). Urban rivers that have been forgotten or buried underground for years often wind their way through neighborhoods that also have been forgotten, marginalized, or intentionally burdened with infrastructure like landfills, power plants, and sports arenas that damage the quality of life for residents.

The remedy: equitable urban river restoration, which recognizes the value of both the people and the river—and connects them together for impact. In my experience, there are four critical components needed to successfully move an equitable urban river restoration forward.

Discovery is the active uncovering of something lost, unknown, or simply hidden from sight, invisible. Discovery is also an unpacking of the history of the river and the community. Understanding the reasons why the river in this community looks different from the river upstream or in other neighborhoods is critical in piecing together the way forward.

Once the river, the community, and their shared history are known, the next opportunity is to engage imaginations around the possibility for transformation. In this step partners envision, dream, and ultimately, plan for a different future. To engage and sustain involvement of a critical mass of stakeholders, people need to believe that change is possible and achievable for their community. This means first identifying and communicating community priorities. In the case of Intrenchment Creek in Atlanta, the Turner Field Community Benefits Coalition surveyed over 1,000 households and determined that the top priorities for neighborhood redevelopment were addressing flooding and combined sewer spills and getting a neighborhood grocery store. These recommendations codified in the [Stadium Neighborhoods Livable Centers Initiative](#) served as the basis for the recent [Intrenchment Creek One Water Management Plan: Advancing Equity and Addressing Flooding and Combined Sewer Spills in the Heart of Atlanta](#), developed by Intrenchment Creek One Water Management Task Force convened by [American Rivers](#) and [ECO-Action](#).

Implementing successful, tangible projects connected to community and other stakeholder priorities is the third step. Responding to Intrenchment Creek headwaters community interest in addressing flooding, the Georgia Department of Transportation, Central Atlanta Progress



and American Rivers implemented an interstate green infrastructure pilot project at the crossroads of I-20 and I-75/85 to remove stormwater run off from the highways from the already overburdened stormwater pipes. Projects like these can provide momentum and attract more interest excitement around the work.

Lastly, it is critical that a sustainable constituency with community leadership and shared decision-making is in place to implement the long-game work of restoring a river and transforming a community. In most cases, the degradation and marginalization of urban rivers and their neighborhoods took generations. This means that it will take some time to create thriving, healthy rivers and communities again. To sustain the work in the long run, it is essential that a dedicated and organized group of stakeholders commit to implementation of the vision, projects, policies, and processes needed to make the envisioned changes. In the case of Intrenchment Creek the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network, led by ECO-Action, spent years training community leaders on how to engage in water decision-making and ultimately catalyzed the new [Intrenchment Creek Community Stewardship Council](#) which will serve as a voice for the creek communities to advance their collective priorities into the future.

We have historically treated the community as separate from the watershed, from the river. We can't do that anymore. Restoring an urban river can be daunting, particularly when the river is invisible or inaccessible. Until the fate of the river and the community are connected, we will not succeed in equitably restoring or transforming either. We must address both the marginalization of the river and the marginalization of the community in order to create thriving communities with healthy rivers and clean water for all.

Trash Reduction in Proctor Creek and Beyond

Reducing Plastic Wastes in Our Urban Waters and preventing their impact on our Oceans!

By Darryl Haddock

Proctor Creek is one of the most impaired waterways in the metro Atlanta area. It has been troubled by frequent flooding, erosion, stormwater runoff, and pollution from illegal dumping. Proctor Creek is a tributary of the Chattahoochee River Watershed and its waters eventually flow to the Gulf of Mexico.

National Geographic reported 5 years ago that there are 5.25 trillion pieces of plastic debris in the world's oceans with 269,000 tons of it afloat on the surface. Most of that material comes from land, transported by stormwater. In an effort to impact these statistics, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA) and our partners are leading a community call for a Trash Trap Network in the Proctor Creek watershed.

It took almost a decade but we finally have our Trash Trap Network!

Our 1st trash interrupt technology, installed in summer of 2019, was Osprey Initiative LLC's "Litter Gitter", a small-stream litter collection device that uses floating booms to guide trash into a collection container. The whole device floats on the water, allowing heavy objects and wildlife to pass underneath. It uses floating booms to guide floating trash into a wire-mesh container, which can be emptied after a rainstorm. Maintenance is minimal. A network of 5-6 of these devices has been placed in various tributaries throughout the watershed.

The higher-capacity Bandalong Litter Trap is a large, industrial-grade aluminum system that uses the water's current to guide debris into a litter trap. The Bandalong is located in a larger body of water fed by tributaries and accounts for more than half of the material collected so far.

The Bandalong and Litter Gitters are visually inspected and cleared of trash and debris weekly and after any large rain event. Trash is removed with nets and by hand, using gloves. Maintenance team members sort and weigh trash on site. The weight of the total trash is recorded and characterized by types: Plastic Bottles, Plastic Bags, Glass Bottles, Other Plastic, Aluminum Cans, Styrofoam, Balls, and organic Debris. The Atlanta trash Trap Network has collectively removed a total of 454.22 pounds of recyclables and 1,040.52 pounds of trash from the watershed through the end of June 2020.

Data sheets are completed on site after each inspection and cleanout. The process is called the Escaped Trash Assessment Protocol ETAP. This information helps us identify litter trends in specific parts of the watershed and form strategies for outreach to the community. Eventually we will reach out to local businesses to help prevent waste from entering Proctor Creek at the source.

Groundwork Atlanta coordinates operation and maintenance of these litter collecting devices as an opportunity to increase green jobs and create local engagement. Their collaboration with Georgia Trade-Up, alongside the trash trap manufacturers, enabled the training of local crews on maintenance for each technology and methods to collect data utilizing ETAP.

West Atlanta Watershed Alliance is providing educational tours of our trash traps, with local workforce support from Groundwork Atlanta and Chattahoochee Riverkeeper. Our project goal was to offer environmental education tours as field trips to the Proctor Creek Watershed for 9th -12th graders from 2019 - 2020. During the project period, despite the pandemic, WAWA has completed several trash trap tours hosting 75 Metro Atlanta high school students.

Georgia Institute of Technology Innovation and Design Collaborative (Design Bloc) has also committed to support WAWA's plastic upcycling research through a year long, student-driven service project. Design Bloc engaged Proctor Creek community members by listening to their insights, needs, and values to determine: (1) Who is directly impacted by the plastic pollutants placed into the creek and/or (2) What would they like to see these community-sourced plastics be directed into, that would positively impact their immediate environment. We participated in their Fall design research presentation and await their final design projects next semester.

Some of the material for this article is derived from the "Trash Trap Feasibility Study", a report produced by Chattahoochee Riverkeeper and funded through a grant from the Coca-Cola Foundation



AWLN Class of 2020 Valedictory Address, By Alfred Tucker

Good Morning,

Dr. Noibi, Brother Darryl, Professor Na'Taki, Dr. Holloman, Shannon, Classmates, Friends:

Many African proverbs are strongly tied to the earth and animals, conveying lessons of life. Allow me to share with you some ancestral insights from the Mother Land. These proverbs apply to some of the lessons we have learned in class. But first here are two insightful proverbs that are funny but so true.

If you think you have someone eating out of your hands, it is a good idea to count your fingers. Nigerian proverb

Copying everyone else all the time, the monkey one day cut his throat. Zula proverb

Over the course of the last six months, I've met a lot of wonderful folks in this group; I've learned a lot about water, climate change and pollution. I've had the opportunity to expand my horizons through remote learning platforms conducted by regional and national environmental advocacy groups. I'm grateful for the training provided by Atlanta Watershed Learning Network (AWLN) and I wish to express special thanks to you Dr. Noibi for your support and encouragement. You inspired me more than you know. Two African proverbs:

Slander by the stream will be heard by the frogs -Mozambican proverb

Earth is the queen of beds - Namibian proverb

I joined the class because I wanted to learn about the ecology of creeks and streams. Each person in class no doubt had their own agenda at the start. The common expectation was to learn something. The online workbook is loaded with information. I'll be reading it, watching the videos and looking at the charts and diagrams for months, even years, to come.

African proverb - Where water is the boss, there the land must obey

Yoruba proverb - Where you will sit when you are old shows where you stood in youth

Service learning is the core principle of our training. Serve your community while expanding your knowledge and developing your leadership skills.

Kenyan proverb - Do not follow a person who is running away.

Ethiopian proverb - He who learns, teaches

Nigerian proverb - Other people's wisdom prevents the king from being called a fool.

Members of our class have great potential. They are people who, by way of their experience and knowledge, will prove invaluable as community advocates.

People like:

Char Johnson, who heads the Hunter Hills neighborhood association and works with NPU-K and **Mrs. Darden**, who is actively fighting for environmental justice and the end of flooding in the Peopletown community.

People like:

Eboni Green, who has business connections that can be leveraged to create environmental learning opportunities in marginalized communities. **Travie Leslie**, who has a track record fighting to stop illegal dumping in her community. **Merle Skipwith**, who has the elocution and authoritarian tone of Barbara Jordan in her voice. She would command attention in any room. Her voice will serve her well in a leadership role. If any of our younger class participants aren't familiar with Barbara Jordan, look her up.

Chris Teal, who is ahead of the curve as a landscaper. I'll bet he can spot an improper or illegal land development technique from a mile away. **John Sheffield**, who has the demeanor of a college professor. John is a deep thinker, guided by logic. He's exploring the intersection of environment and social justice. **Franklin Mack**, who is concerned for seniors in his community and the impact on them by environmental inequities.

As we end our AWLN experience I challenge each and every participant to continue the work you have started here. Share your knowledge with your community; become a community leader and use your knowledge to help fight for clean water and environmental justice. Expand your skills in developing effective strategies for influencing authority.

Be a mountain or lean on one -Somali proverb

A flea can trouble a lion more than a lion can trouble a flea -Kenyan proverb

A crowd can easily overpower a bull -South African proverb

In conclusion, I wish all of you success in the next phase of your journey.

"Because my grandchildren may experience the consequences of increased flooding, storm damage, droughts and heat-related health issues, I am moved to do my part in helping to work for solutions to these problems". -Alfred Tucker, Proctor Creek Resident