

ATLANTA WATERSHED LEARNING NETWORK



Seeing Beyond

What makes the AWLN learning approach work?

Can you connect the nine dots below using only four lines? This is one of many activities that AWLN participants do to promote open-minded learning. One of the major differences between the AWLN and most traditional education programs is that AWLN provides a creative space where participants feel safe to think outside of the box and strive to become change agents in their local watersheds. The cohort participants range in age from 4 -70, which provides a very unique opportunity for intergenerational learning.

Our Watersheds

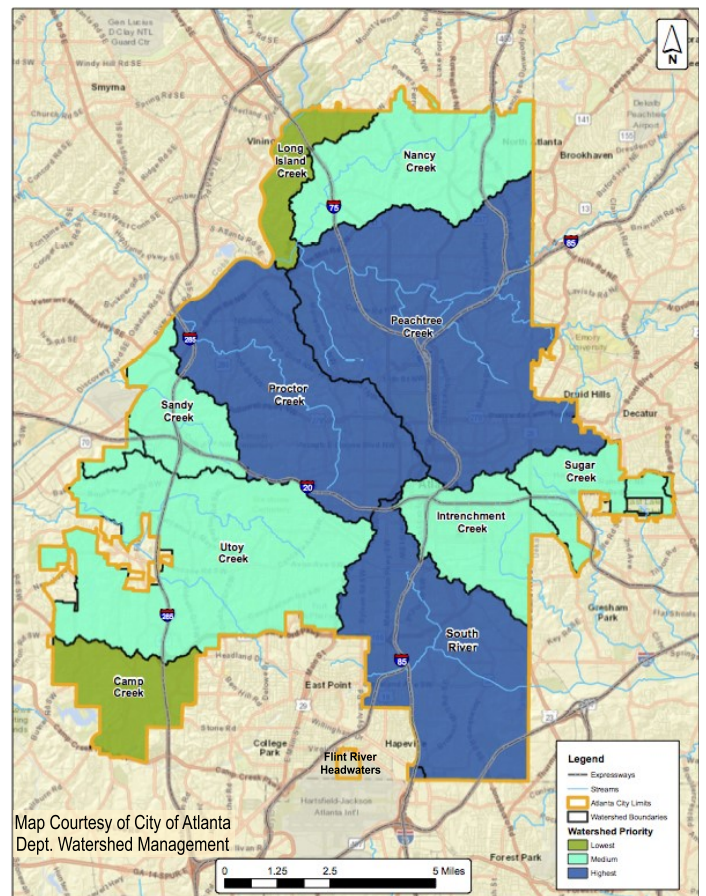
The Atlanta Watershed Learning Network actively works in:

- Flint River (headwaters near Hartsfield Jackson airport)
- Intrenchment Creek (SE Atlanta)
- Proctor Creek (NW Atlanta)

These watersheds are heavily impacted by urbanization in Atlanta and therefore are the primary focus of the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network. The residents from these watersheds come together with a unified goal; to gain knowledge about the environmental and economic impacts of these polluted waters on their communities and to advocate for sustainable solutions to these problems. Now, it's time to grow the network to include other watersheds and promote watershed health for all.

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Lessons from My Community Creek

By: Merri Sheffield, 2018 AWLN Graduate, Flint River

Countless times College Park residents drive down Hershel Road and cross the refurbished bridge, with its lovely backdrop and ease of passage. A nice improvement for a vital community, but is it really? Encouraged by Dr. Yomi Noibi of ECO-Action to look past the obvious, I stopped and took a closer look. One side of the bridge overlooks a beautiful little creek surrounded by pebbles and greenery, but bridges have two sides and so does this story.

On the east side of the bridge, I see fish swimming in circles in what appears to be stagnant, unhealthy water. How is it possible? It's a matter of yards between one point and the other, but a completely different reality. Could it be the pipe that crosses the creek, or maybe something

underneath the bridge causing the problem? We have yet to learn the causes, but soon a project will uncover the issues and restore the creek to health.

One of the greatest lessons I've learned as a part of the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network is that if we are to have clean water for this and future generations we must stop, look, and explore. We turn on faucets and just assume clean water will pour from the spout. It's a privilege that too often goes unrecognized.



"If we do not stand up for watershed protection and demand day-to-day respect for our creeks, rivers and tributaries, clean water — a luxury we take for granted — may be no more. Clean water tomorrow depends on us today."



Something happens to the creek when the water passes under the bridge. (Far Left, Right) Note how you can see movement in the water in the bottom of the photo; however it is still on the top of the photo. (Center) Dr. Yomi Noibi explains that for this creek, or any body of water, to be healthy, the water must flow.

"The South River is one of the most threatened rivers in Georgia and it is not alone. In 2019, South River Watershed Alliance will launch the **Manage State Waters as a Resource** campaign. When managed as a resource, water quality in our streams, creeks, and rivers becomes paramount. Organizations statewide will be asked to share examples of how water quality in their waterways could be improved with more effective enforcement of state clean water regulations. This data will be submitted to federal and state environmental regulators. To read more about this initiative [click here](#). More information on how you can help will be shared in the coming months."

- Jacqueline M. Echols, Ph.D., South River Watershed Alliance, *President*

Still Waters Run Deep

Intergenerational learning with Ms. Juanita Wallace

Ms. Juanita Wallace, pictured here, is an AWLN graduate and lifetime resident of English Avenue. She has mastered the art of intergenerational learning. She colors stories about the glory days of living near a vibrant inner-city Proctor Creek in a way that excites children to become change agents in their communities. These relationships, separated by decades of time yet bound by an innate curiosity of the environment around them, keep these educational ties strong. Her hope is that one day, kids will be able to eat crawfish and play in the creek just like she did growing up.



"[Kids] love to see the enviroscape because they can see how the candy wrappers end up from their hands into our creek. I think they understand how it changes our environment and want to help make it a clean creek."

"Almost every Thursday I collect samples of the [Proctor Creek] water and take it to Chattahoochee Riverkeeper. They test it for E. coli and post it on their website. The creek was healthy when I was a kid and that's what I want to see again."



"You know kids are smart. They pick up on things fast and see the world different than we do. I enjoy telling kids my stories about this creek. Most of the time, they are very wise and get excited to help out, even if it's because I gave them a piece of change to come with me."



How Often Do We Flood?

By: The Metropolitan Atlanta Urban Watershed Institute, Tom Nguyen and Dr. Ellen Zegura

The residential communities around Turner Field/GSU Stadium in the upper Intrenchment Creek Watershed experienced flooding five times in a recent four-year period, 2009 to 2012. City of Atlanta engineers report that the two largest design storms were in 2012:

- July 9– 2.54 inches in 45 minutes, a 10 to 25-year storm
- July 11– 1.55 in. in 45 minutes, a 2 to 5-year storm

Residents in the Vine City and English Avenue neighborhoods in the Proctor Creek watershed on the westside of town still speak of major floods from 2002 and 2009. Rain event data archived by the U.S. Historical Climatology Network located in Newnan, Georgia, show that we have had 71, 2 to 25-year rain events in the past 120 years, or once every 20 months. Keep in mind that this sized rain event was less likely to have caused flooding 100 or even 50 years ago. However, as Atlanta has become more densely populated and paved, rain events cause increased flooding. Rain events larger than the 25-year event, like the 100-year event, cause even more extreme flooding.

There are indications that climate change is increasing the size of rain events. To reduce the public health and property damage risks associated with flooding, we need to keep excess stormwater out of our undersized sewer systems.

We can capture and manage stormwater in both retention cisterns and detention ponds. Many places in the world capture and store rainwater for future use; for them stormwater storage cisterns are a necessity. For us, stormwater cisterns can bring a similar resilience to Atlanta neighborhoods. In addition, choosing to manage stormwater in short term detention ponds provides a win/win strategy to justify more neighborhood parks and greenways.



Intrenchment Creek

Proctor Creek



During heavy rain events, the city storm drains become overwhelmed by the large amounts of water. The drains are also clogged with litter and other debris which makes them even more inefficient. There just isn't enough room for all the water during large storms.

Like a Good Neighbor

By: Raina Turner, 2018 AWLN Graduate, Intrenchment Creek

Water is a finite resource that maintains the balance of life on Earth. The health of our water sources determines the quality of life for humans, animals, and plants/vegetation. As humans transform natural environments into heavily populated built environments, impermeable surfaces and pollution in our water sources contribute to a much larger environmental issue. The interwoven toxicity the water carries downstream into communities begs that we make intentional efforts to preserve water quality for us all.

Dr. Jacqueline Echols, South River Watershed Alliance president, spoke to our cohort about water being a finite resource and the drastic differences of water quality in downstream communities. After this discussion, I reflected on the fact that the water we currently drink is more polluted than the water that my great, great grandmother drank; even more troubling, it's more polluted than what my father drank. Despite our best efforts, some of the impacts humans have had on water cannot be reversed. Knowing this, I am compelled to do something to ensure my daughter can at least say the water she drinks is not more polluted than what we consume today.

We should be good neighbors in our immediate community, but we should also be good neighbors to those who live downstream.

As a AWLN participant, I have not only learned a great deal about water policy, green infrastructure, and hidden waterways, but also shared this knowledge with my family, friends, and business partners. Recently, I was approached to join a team of developers for a major multi-million dollar project in Vine City. During our proposal stages, I asked the developers how they would incorporate green infrastructure like bio-swales or permeable pavers into their design and if they were aware of the City's requirement for all new developments to capture the first inch of stormwater runoff. I highlighted flooding issues in the Vine City area and the value of Proctor Creek.

To my surprise, the team emphasized resilience and sustainability as the developments key factors during the proposal presentation. They mentioned bioretention and preserving/ planting greenery on site to merge their development with the environment! I was extremely pleased and excited to see what a simple question or two could do for a project of this magnitude.

Participating alongside my fiancée in the AWLN is an asset to our team and to the communities we will be serving this year. The presenters, partners and supporters of our network have been very generous in their time and commitment to ensuring our project is a success by volunteering to lead a few workshops. This network afforded me the opportunity to present at a Finding the Flint meeting where I shared and absorbed a lot of the information about our local watersheds. Their plans to revitalize the Flint around the airport and brand the river as a destination seems to be a beautiful concept even though the more accessible rivers and streams are to humans, the greater chance of pollution. I am looking forward to seeing their plan come to fruition and restore the health of the river.

I will advocate for clean water and continuing the work of educating others to make a difference in their local watershed. We should be good neighbors in our immediate community, but we should also be good neighbors to those who live downstream. If we make lifestyle changes to decrease the amount of waste we create that ends up downstream AND encourage others to do the same, we can be better neighbors across the state. Effective resident communication strategies, practical lifestyle changes and education are simple solutions to the complex problems our daily decisions create.

Thank you to our Partners!



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