



The Upper Oconee Watershed Network is dedicated to protecting water resources and improving stream health in our watershed through community-based advocacy, monitoring, education, and recreation.

From the President

Hello UOWN Friends,

2017 has been a successful year and we are looking forward to an awesome 2018! Let me start by thanking everyone for their support throughout the year. For nearly twenty years, with your help, we have been keeping an eye on water quality and protecting our watershed.

There have been some changes in our Board of Directors. After three years as our Outreach Chair, Hunter Jones left to pursue other interests. Hunter was instrumental in establishing and maintaining our social media presence. Jason Westrich is conducting post-doc research. Jason has been helping us for many years with bacterial analysis of our water samples. We are very grateful for Hunter's and Jason's assistance and wish them the best of luck in future endeavors.

We welcome three new members to the board. Morgan Teachey is a PhD student in Microbiology with an interest in policy. She has already contributed via an internship last Fall. Our bacterial analysis is now in the capable hands of Megan Robertson and Martinique Edwards, both of whom have worked in the Lipp Lab with Jason.

We also made some changes to the Executive Committee. Bruno Giri took over the Education Chair previously vacated by Kate Mowbray. Cassidy Lord is now Vice-President while pursuing a M.S. in Forestry Resources at UGA. I am now trying my hand at being President and hopefully putting my MA in

Management of Nonprofit Organizations to good use.

We have many exciting plans for 2018. This year is the 20th River Rendezvous. I find it astonishing that UOWN has been conducting citizen science for 20 years! This year's event is scheduled for April 28. We intend to make it very memorable with great food and live music.

In the Fall is our 2nd biennial Upper Oconee Science and Policy Summit. The first summit brought together researchers at UGA, governmental leadership and staff for great presentations about our watershed and discussions on how science informs best practices.

In addition to our outreach activities we will be adding a new initiative called Where's My Creek. In conjunction with ACC Stormwater, we intend to leverage our extensive data and knowledge of the watershed to instill ownership of our creeks and streams within the community.

Finally, our Education and Oconee Waters committees are planning some very informative workshops.

I feel truly fortunate to be part of this organization. We have a very committed and knowledgeable board dedicated to protecting one of our most precious natural resources. I encourage you to join us as we are always looking for volunteers at all levels. Check out our website (www.uown.org) or find us on Facebook.

You can reach Peter Norris via info@uown.org

Education Committee Report

Greetings from the UOWN Education Committee!! It is my pleasure to share with you an update about our accomplishments in 2017 and preview of new projects for 2018. This year saw us return to many events that we've done before, such as the Athens Water Festival, Marigold Festival, and the Insectival. We also spent time at some new venues such as the Athens Pride Festival. We talked to so many folks, new and old friends alike, and picked through even more macroinvertebrate samples! As a result of making contact with new friends, we have in the works a plan to put together a set of activities for a group of homeschool students and their teachers in spring 2018.



Bruno at Athens Pride Festival

We are also working with our friends at the State Botanical Gardens to present a new workshop at the Gardens for stream and buffer restoration techniques. The basic idea is for folks to learn how to use native plants to “buff up” their creek and riverside buffers in their own backyards. We hope that it will catch on as a simple way to fight back against water quality impairments and make it sustainable. We are very excited to offer this opportunity and there will be more information to follow as it develops.

The last, and my favorite, event for 2018 will be the 2nd Biennial Upper Oconee Science and Planning Summit. After an exciting debut in 2016, we have started to plan the next in-

stallment. This is more than just a job for the Education Committee and will involve many other folks from UOWN and friends. These include ACC Stormwater, Odum School of Ecology, River Basin Center, UGA Office of Sustainability and more. If any of these sounds enticing to you, the more the merrier!! Email me at education@uown.org or message us at the UOWN Facebook page.

I know that I speak for the board when I say thanks for the support of our group in 2017 and we look forward to 2018 and beyond. I especially want to thank my hard-working committee members including Deb Dooley, Julia Schmitz, Jackie Elder, Diane Windham, Michael Pianti and Liz French!!

If you would like to be part of the education committee or volunteer for an event, please contact Bruno Giri via education@uown.org.

Oconee County Committee

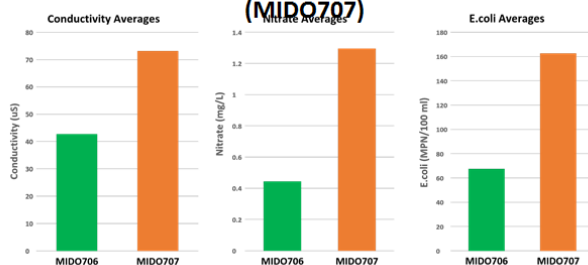
Oconeewaters volunteers stayed busy this past year monitoring our Adopt-A-Stream sites, helping with UOWN Quarterlies, and serving on committees. Volunteers served on UOWN's Science and Monitoring Committee, Education Committee, Water Trails Committee (Chair) and several on Oconee County committees such as Oconee County's Joint Comprehensive Plan Stakeholders Committee. Under the pressures of increased development, Oconeewaters volunteers advocated for our watershed at town hall meetings, special public meetings, county commission meetings, and GA DOT meetings.

UOWN Oconeewaters committee continues to encourage citizen science by offering GA DNR Adopt-A-Stream workshops in Oconee County. These workshops teach citizen scientists how to assess the water quality and habitat of local streams and rivers using chemical, biological, and bacterial testing. Since Nov. 2015, when the committee was formed, 14 AAS workshops have been provided free of charge to the public. To date a total of 75 AAS certifications

have been earned: 48 chemical, 22 biological, and 5 bacterial. This past year we also conducted a bacterial workshop in Jefferson for citizen scientists in Jackson County working on an EPD funded grant project in the Mulberry River Watershed. People from across the state attend our workshops; some of whom even work to provide watershed education as part of their jobs as private or public school teachers.

Luke Mourneault, an Oconee County High School student and Oconeewaters volunteer, completed a science fair project using UOWN and AAS data. He presented his findings at the statewide Georgia Adopt-A-Stream Confluence Conference this past spring. Luke won the UOWN award for student science fair projects that address some aspect of the UOWN mission.

Calls Creek Water Treatment Plant – Upstream (MIDO706) vs. Downstream (MIDO707)



AAS Confluence Conference; Luke Morneault

Reaching out to Oconee County citizens to provide watershed education and encourage volunteerism has taken several forms. Oconeewaters organized an Ice Cream Social at Harris Shoals Park this past spring. Educational games, a watershed model, macroinvertebrate sampling, and a large map to locate “your” stream helped all ages appreciate our watershed. Oconeewaters made visits to Scout Troops, Athens Academy, and Oconee County High School to publicize UOWN and Oconeewaters opportunities such as Rivers Alive Clean Up, Georgia Adopt-A-Stream Program, and leadership opportunities with Oconeewaters.

Additionally, four Oconeewaters volunteers represented UOWN at UGA’s inaugural Marine Debris Workshop in November. Volunteers en-

gaged participants with interactive display and games in addition to the traditional tabling. We connected with numerous organizations and gathered information about possible new initiatives combatting plastic debris in our watershed.

We look forward to another year of outreach and advocacy and hope to see our numbers grow, increasing our involvement with local schools and organizations.

Contact Vicki Soutar via oconeewaters@gmail.com

Science & Monitoring Committee

Thank you to all of the volunteers who made 2017 another successful year of monitoring. We sampled 55 sites in February, over 90 at River Rendezvous in April, 39 sites during the Summer quarterly, and finished the year sampling 43 sites in November.

In addition to our typical quarterly monitoring events we also helped put on the first ever Bio Blitz with Oconee River Land Trust (ORLT) in February. This was an idea that ORLT conceived to showcase some of the beautiful conservation easements they monitor. For this event we walked part of the easement and sampled water quality and macroinvertebrates from the stream on Tallassee Forest. We hope to collaborate with ORLT again to have another event in 2018 so check our events page frequently for updates!

We also presented on the health of Athens’s streams at the Georgia Water Resources Conference in April. We presented long-term trends in macroinvertebrate biotic indices and possible causes of stream health degradation.

We continue to collaborate with four labs at UGA, USDA, and the EPA analyzing bacterial communities in our streams (including human pathogens like *E. coli*). This Fall we also found out that two labs from UGA and one from the USDA received funding to sample *E. coli* at many more sites than the typical 12 we do each quarterly. The purpose of this new study is to

investigate the prevalence of antibiotic resistant bacteria in our watershed. We hope to have *E. coli* data from approximately 40 sites at each quarterly in 2018. UOWN is certainly excited to continue this great collaboration.



Families participate in water monitoring.

I'd like to begin this year by encouraging you to consider becoming trained in macroinvertebrate sampling. We were not able to collect as many macroinvertebrate samples as we would like in 2017 because of a lack of trained volunteers. We really need volunteers to help with this; particularly in the Spring and Fall. Learning to sample and identify aquatic insects, crustaceans, and gastropods is a great way to get involved with UOWN and help us monitor the health of our watershed. Macroinvertebrates are the best tool we have to monitor the long-term health of our streams. We are considering moving to a new model for our macroinvertebrate samples in which volunteers choose or are assigned to a stream to sample once during the spring and once during the fall. This format might allow volunteers to sample on their own time. The hope is that this would encourage more people to get involved with this aspect of monitoring by allowing *you* to choose when you sample. If this sounds like something you are interested in doing please

contact us! Please consider getting trained and getting involved!

Contact Phillip Bumpers (science@uown.org) if you are interested in being a part of science and monitoring with UOWN.

Report from Water Trails

After a short hiatus, the Upper Oconee Water Trail committee reorganized in April 2016. Our most successful accomplishment to date has been the installation of the Ben Burton launch ramp on the Middle Oconee River. The ramp was opened in May of 2016. It is a ramp designed for non-motorized boats to access the river; however, anglers, researchers, and water quality monitors frequently use the ramp as well. Signage and a kiosk have been recently added to address safety concerns.

The committee continues to evaluate future launch sites. Our current priority is to locate a take-out site further down the Middle Oconee River that will provide recreational boats a reasonable distance to paddle and safe egress from the river. Longer range goals include sites on the North Oconee River as well as the Oconee River south of the confluence.

On the educational front, we held two successful events during the past year. In June, a VIP paddle was held on the North Oconee River. Government officials and community stakeholders paddled the river corridor in the downtown area. The paddle highlighted the importance of the river to future economic development in downtown Athens. In September, as part of Rivers Alive, we organized the first "on the river" clean-up of the North Oconee River. Both events were highly successful and well attended.

Significant progress has been made on water trails public information. We created a fact sheet and a talking points guide to address landowners with river front property. We have mapped the entire Upper Oconee watershed. Our map includes a number of prospective launch sites. We have an email address, active

website, and social media presence on Facebook and Instagram. Committee members monitor these contacts on a regular basis and answer questions that arise.



VIP Paddlers on North Oconee at Dudley Park

What are our future goals? We would like to establish three additional launch sites above and below Ben Burton Park on the Middle Oconee River. We would also like to establish four launch sites on the North Oconee River. When the White Dam is removed on the Middle Oconee River, we would like to establish a launch site below the confluence of Middle and North Oconee Rivers. A site near this location could include camping so that anglers and paddlers could have multi-day paddles to explore lower portions of the river. We would also like to create safe portage around the Tallahassee Dam and the Barnett Shoals Dam. With these facilities in place, paddlers could safely traverse all ninety-eight river miles of the Upper Oconee Water Trail!

If you are interested in helping out with water trails please contact Diane Windham via uowt@uown.org

Advocacy Report

The advocacy group began the year by attending a presentation by ACC Water Conservation Office on Risk Based Water Supply Assessment for Drought Resilience. The

office recommends, in addition to continued conservation measures, the construction of a water reuse system to mitigate future supply problems. We were very excited to hear about this common-sense solution and wrote a letter of support to ACC Mayor & Commission who subsequently adopted the plan.

For many years Oconee County neglected its water treatment plant. That facility has failed many times, most recently on January 12, 2018 spilling 24,000 gallons of untreated sewage into Calls Creek, a tributary of the Middle Oconee. In February of 2017, the Oconee County Commission approved an expenditure of \$13.4 million to upgrade the facility. We face future challenges as the County is still considering discharging up to 3 million gallons of treated sewage into Calls Creek, well beyond the creek's capacity.

At the end of the last state legislative session, Senator Frank Ginn (47th district: Barrow, Clarke, Jackson, Madison) proposed eliminating stormwater fees for certain "water neutral" customers (SB 116). The bill was never brought to the floor for a vote. Instead, the legislature approved a resolution forming a committee to study the issue (SR 224). That committee met in Athens on October 5, 2017. SB116 is widely opposed by municipalities and environmental organizations across Georgia. UOWN attended the meeting and had our comments opposing SB116 read into the official record.

As it switches to natural gas, Georgia Power (GP) is de-commissioning a number of its coal burning power generation facilities. Coal ash from these facilities has been stored in ponds. GP is now in the process of de-watering those ponds, emptying the water into Georgia's rivers, including the Oconee. UOWN attended state level meetings about the issue and submitted comments. We continue to monitor the issue.

In May of 2015, President Obama issued an executive order defining which waters of the

United States were protected by the Clean Water Act. This executive order strengthened protection for wetlands and intermittent streams. In August of 2016, a federal court stayed that executive order. More recently, President Trump, issued an executive order reversing President Obama's executive order. UOWN submitted a letter to the EPA supporting protection of watersheds.

Morgan Teachey developed an excellent illustration describing how recommendations become ordinances in Athens Clarke County. You can review this illustration, learn more about the above issues, and read UOWN's policy statements on our website.

If you are interested in helping shape policy, please contact us via advocacy@uown.org

Outreach Committee

UOWN is excited to introduce our newest outreach campaign, **Where's My Creek?**

Do you know which of the 17 watersheds of Athens-Clarke County you live in? Do you know the major impairments to your creek? If not, you're not alone. Fifteen creeks and two rivers is a lot in our littlest of counties but we're here to help you discover your home watershed. Stay tuned for more about our interactive GIS platform, watershed specific information, and the reprinting of ACC Stormwater Department's amazing watershed graphics.



Where's My Creek graphic

2017 Rivers Alive Athens Recap

What a year for Rivers Alive Athens! The weather was beautiful, the Golden Pantry biscuits were delicious and we had a record turnout of volunteers:

- 405 volunteers helped
- 21 sites cleaned
- 150 tires removed
- 3.1 tons of trash collected
- 1 ton of waste recycled
- 1440 lbs of metal recycled
- 1 kayak raffled

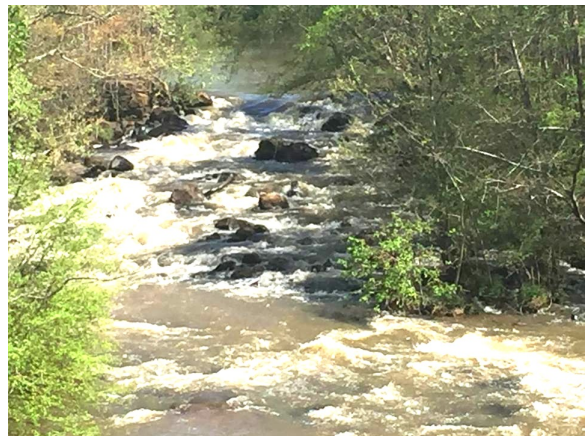
We'll see you again next year!

Please contact Cassidy at outreach@uown.org if you are interested in helping the Outreach Committee.

Internships

UOWN continues to provide students with experiential learning opportunities. We have the following positions: bookkeeper, event planner, secretary, data analyst, researcher, and social media specialist.

If you are interested in interning for UOWN, please contact us via info@uown.org.



North Oconee at Easley Mill

Join UOWN

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