



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,

2018 has been a spectacularly successful year and we look forward to carrying that momentum into 2019. Let me start by thanking you for their support throughout the year. For twenty years, with your help, we have been monitoring our water quality and protecting our watershed.

This past Spring, UOWN celebrated the **20th** Annual River Rendezvous. In 1998 a group of farsighted individuals recognized that the increasing urbanization of Athens-Clarke County was having a detrimental effect on our creeks and rivers. To quantify that effect, they held the first ever River Rendezvous. We are proud to continue this vital effort.

Our Second Biennial Upper Oconee Science and Policy Summit was a great success, bringing together researchers, policy experts, elected officials, and county directors.

The Education committee expanded our reach with more events while the Oconee Waters committee made significant contributions to our south including work on a long running issue with Apalachee River and Hard Labor Creek Reservoir. The Advocacy committee has developed great working relationships with ACC staff and frequently submit statements to the Mayor and Commission. The Water Trails committee is securing a launch on the Middle Oconee and submitted a SPLOST 2020 proposal to build out the entire water trail. We completed production of the Where's My Creek

outreach initiative and, thanks to the work of Martinique Edwards, converted our membership spreadsheet to a secure online system.

This year we added three highly qualified individuals to our board. Jake McDonald is a Postdoctoral Research Scientist specializing in Fluvial Geomorphology (he really gets the shape of riverbeds and GIS). Reilly Farrell is a Journalism and Ecology double major who has been working with the education committee. His writing and PR skills are greatly appreciated. Bear Jordan is an experienced environmental chemist returning to Athens for a graduate degree in Geography. The Science committee has already scooped him up!

This has been a very productive year and I am truly grateful for the extra efforts of our ALL VOLUNTEER board. Their expertise and dedication is inspiring. I encourage you to join us. 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 your UOWN Education Committee! It is my pleasure to share an update with you about our accomplishments for this year our new projects for 2019.

This year saw us return to many events that we've done before, such as the Athens Water Festival, Insectival, Rivers Alive, and Athens Pride Festival. We also tabled at a new event at Sandy Creek Nature Center called World Toilet Day. We talked to so many folks, new and old

friends alike, and picked through even more macroinvertebrate samples!

In September, we convened the 2nd Biennial Upper Oconee Science and Policy Summit at UGA's Special Collections Library. The event was a coordinated effort between the education committee and many of our friends including: Athens-Clarke County Stormwater Management Program, the Water Conservation Office, Odum School of Ecology, UGA Sustainability, Oconee Rivers Greenway Commission, Athens Land Trust, and many more. It was a reinvigorating time for all and demonstrated the importance of collaboration.



Bruno and Deb instructing children at Water Festival

We continue to develop resources for educators which includes a program for homeschool students and their parents. We're also moving forward 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 participants to learn how to use a combination

of native planting and slope stabilization to restore creek and riverside buffers in their own backyards. We hope that it will catch on as a simple way to counteract water quality impairment. We are very excited to offer this opportunity and will provide more information as the workshop develops.

I know that I speak for the board when I say thanks for the support of our group in 2018 and we look forward to 2019. I especially want to thank my hard-working committee members including: Deb Dooley, Jackie Elder, Reilly Farrell, Liz French, Michael Pianti, Kate Mowbray, Julia Schmitz and Diane Windham!

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 Waters Committee

It has been an exciting and productive year for UOWN OconeeWaters. We offered Georgia Adopt-A-Stream (AAS) certification workshops to increase the number of certified volunteers helping with UOWN Quarterly Sampling, monitoring OconeeWaters' AAS sites, and encouraging new AAS sites in the state. Eighteen monitors locally and across the state received certifications or recerts with us this past year. Five members of the Greater Apalachee River Community (GARC) became AAS certified.

We monitor AAS sites monthly for chemical parameters and take biological samples quarterly; however, we need more volunteers monitor our eight sites on Barber and Calls Creeks. View our AAS data collected on the Georgia Adopt-A-Stream website.

UOWN OconeeWaters helped GARC members adopt and begin monitoring their AAS sites as well as supplying the needed equipment for monitoring. At least 7 GARC members joined UOWN through individual or family memberships in support of UOWN's mission and have representation at OconeeWaters' regular monthly meetings held on the fourth

Thursday of each month. We are seeing so many opportunities to work together and would love to have you join us.

OconeeWaters and UOWN board members lent support to GARC as they set up their non-profit status and advocated for protecting the Apalachee River which is part of the Upper Oconee River Watershed. UOWN advocated for protection of the Apalachee River by writing comments and letters to the Army Corp of Engineers and the Oconee County Board of Commissioners. Alongside GARC members, OconeeWaters members attended Hard Labor Creek Management Board meetings and meetings of the Morgan County and Oconee County Board of Commissioners to voice UOWN concerns about the Walton County Sewerage Authority's Permit application (based on 2004 data) for an intake on the Apalachee River. The proposed intake would divert water from the Apalachee River to keep the Hard Labor Creek Reservoir filled. We look forward to continuing this partnership with GARC to make a difference in the Upper Oconee Watershed.

Diane Windham, Ken Morneault, and Vicki Soutar attended an EPA workshop at which they built then deployed, along with Luke Morneault's help, a continuous remote monitoring sensor at our AAS Hickory Hill monitoring site.

Laura Iyer actively serves on the UOWN SMC and helped Allan Antley and Vicki Soutar conduct the first biological sampling at the Daniels Bridge site on Barber Creek. OconeeWaters members helped the Science and Monitoring Committee advocate for a portion of the DOT fine being leveed for improperly installed erosion control measures on Barber Creek. We will use the funds to increase our local monitoring efforts.

OconeeWaters has nurtured a working relationships with the Oconee County Water Resources and Oconee County Commissioners to help improve and protect county waters. Tim Durham, Oconee County Water Resources

Director, has attended our meetings, helped us pick sites for new sensors on Calls and Barber Creeks, pursue partnerships and, and is involved in our outreach efforts.



Macrobenthic invertebrate sampling at Harris Shoals Park.

The first Watkinsville Envirofest was held at Harris Shoals Park. The Water Resources Department, along with University of North Georgia and University of Georgia interns, showed participants how waste water is treated using an EnviroScape model. OconeeWaters' Ken Morneault, Laura Iyer, and Wayne Parks, and, Vicki Soutar along with UOWN President Peter Norris, ran several activities at the event. The "Where's My Creek?" activity initiative helped people locate local their watershed and offered them a report about current conditions on either Barber, Calls, or McNutt Creeks. We also demonstrated macroinvertebrate sampling for assessment of stream health. The impact of pet waste on streams was demonstrated through the "Scoop the Poop" game.

Oconee County Administrator Justin Kirouac was invited and attended the Upper Oconee Science and Policy Summit where he expressed interest in helping Oconee County stakeholders learn more about how our county can benefit from green infrastructure.

At Watkinsville's Frist Saturday on Main Street, Robert Fincher, Jack Cooper, Loren Moores, Dave Wenner, Ken Morneault, and Vicki Soutar ran games and provided literature

about water safety including information about the dangers of low head dams.

Finally, a very deserving, Ken Morneault, received UOWN's "Unsung Hero" award at this year's Greenfest Awards!

Contact Vicki Soutar via ocnewaters@gmail.com

Science & Monitoring Committee

Thank you to all of the volunteers who made this year another great year for monitoring. We sampled 42 sites in the winter, over 80 at River Rendezvous in April, 44 sites during the summer quarterly, and finished the year sampling 49 sites in November.

We are still currently collaborating with labs at UGA, USDA, and the EPA that are studying the bacterial communities in our streams (including human pathogens like E. coli). This year the Science committee was focused on the "Where's My Creek?" initiative that was launched in early fall of 2018 and the UOSPS. In addition, we are working on updating maps for the website and hope to launch a new map of our sample sites on the website soon!



Quarterly Water Sampling

Looking ahead to the upcoming year we will be presenting data at the 2019 Georgia Water Resources Conference that will be hosted in Athens, among a host of other ongoing projects.

I'd like to end this year by encouraging you to consider becoming trained in macroinvertebrate sampling. We were not able to collect as many macroinvertebrate samples as desired in 2018 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. If this sounds like something you are interested in please consider getting trained and becoming involved. UOWN offers Adopt-A-Stream macrobiotic sampling training multiple times a year. The training is free! In addition, we are always looking for volunteers to collect water samples at our quarterly events. If you would like to get more involved please contact us. The winter quarterly will be held on February 3rd and the 2019 River Rendezvous is scheduled for April 6th (check the website for updates). Hope to see you out there!

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

Report from Water Trails

The Upper Oconee Water Trail (UOWT) stakeholders committee has ramped up their efforts during the calendar year to establish additional launch sites.

A site near the Princeton Mill on the Middle Oconee River has been identified and preliminary planning work has begun. This site will establish UOWT as a Georgia Water Trail. It will provide recreational boaters a reasonable paddling distance from our initial launch site at Ben Burton, as well as a safe egress from the river.

UOWT has initiated several community service projects. We have committed to hold at least two events each calendar year to clean up various sections of the water trail. Our first event, held in conjunction with River Rendezvous, occurred in April. Unfortunately, the water level was too high to safely navigate the river; therefore, we opted to use our volunteers

to remove invasive species along the river corridor. Japanese knotweed is a species that travels along water corridors. The team spent the morning making significant headway in removing a troubling section of knotweed along the North Oconee. In October, we joined the Athens Rivers Alive effort to clean up the in-town section of the North Oconee. Both events were highly successful and well attended.



Water Trails Cleanup Crew

River safety has become an increasing concern of the committee following the tragic death of two individuals on Barber Creek. The committee is exploring ways to educate the public regarding significant hazards along the water trail. Our goal is to join with other community organizations to establish a safety committee to investigate ways to prevent future tragedies.

Mapping of the entire Upper Oconee watershed has been completed detailing significant dangerous obstacles. We have an email address, active website, and social media presence on Facebook that we monitor on a regular basis and answer questions that arise regarding this obstacles and ways to safely navigate them. Real time links to water levels along with detailed explanations of how those levels impact paddling will be added to our website in the near future.

What are our future goals? We need to secure funding to establish additional launch

sites above and below Ben Burton Park on the Middle Oconee River. With this goal in mind, we have begun to work with representatives in Jackson and Oconee County, as well as our continued work with the Department of Leisure Services in Athens Clarke County. We would also like to establish launch sites on the North Oconee River, and have begun talk with the Department of Natural Resources to help us with this effort. With the removal of White Dam on the Middle Oconee River this Summer, a launch site below the confluence has become a viable option. A launch site at this location would create an option for multi-day paddles to explore lower portions of the river. Safe portage around the Tallahassee Dam and the Barnett Shoals Dam is a task the safety committee has begun to tackle as well. With the accomplishment of these ambitious goals, the hidden gem in our community will be accessible to all citizens!

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

Advocacy Report

What a year it has been for our Advocacy Committee! We've commented on issues at the federal, state and local level, travelled thousands of miles to attend conferences, and even developed a new committee to support source water watershed protection in the Upper Oconee River Basin.

At the federal level, the Clean Water Rule has been an item of hot dispute, most recently as President Trump has threatened to completely remove it from the protective regulations. This would effectively remove countless miles of streams and acres of wetland from Clean Water Act protections.

At the state level, we were incredibly pleased to see the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act pass. Over \$20 million annually will be set aside from the sales taxes on outdoor gear purchases creating a sustainable source of

funding for land and water conservation. That's how easy it is to protect water quality and quantity!

Locally, we've been very active attending board meetings, mayor and commission meetings, conferences, and forums. We've commented on everything from stormwater utility fee revisions to a solar panel array at the Cedar Creek Water Reclamation Facility. We were successful in obtaining backup systems in case of failure for the amphitheater to be built just upstream of ACC's water intake facility on the North Oconee. We're eagerly anticipating the enthusiasm of the new term of the recently elected Athens-Clarke County Mayor and Commission.

Finally, the UOWN Advocacy Committee would like to take this opportunity to announce the establishment of the Watershed Advisory Committee within Advocacy to promote the conservation of working forests in the Upper Oconee Basin which in turn protect your sources of drinking water. We're excited to see where this project can take us and how it can further the efforts that UOWN has accomplished in our past 20 years of work.

If you'd like to get involved with the Advocacy Committee or you have an item of concern we can help you address, contact us at advocacy@uown.org

Outreach Committee

UOWN is excited to announce 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 are a lot in our littlest of counties but we're here to help you discover your local watershed.

In the Spring, we obtained funding from the Newland Family Foundation to duplicate beautiful graphics representing each watershed on

to refrigerator magnets. Cassidy Lord managed a group of graduate students creating a layout and initial copies of information sheets. With help from SMC and our GIS expert Jake McDonald, we have now completed all production tasks.

We had a soft rollout of "Where's My Creek?" at the Athens Water Festival and were glad to see that folks engaged to learn about their neighborhood creek. Look for us at upcoming festivals and grab a magnet (print materials are also available on our website)!

Contact us via outreach@uown.org

Internships

UOWN continues to provide students with experiential learning opportunities. We have the following positions available: 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.

The UOWN Board

Peter Norris – President
Cassidy Lord – Vice President
Megan Robertson – Treasurer
Morgan Teachey – Secretary
Phillip Bumpers – Science & Monitoring Chair
Martinique Edwards
Reilly Farrell
Bruno Giri – Education Chair
Bear Jordan
Jacob M. McDonald
Bryan Nuse
Vicki Soutar – Oconee Waters Chair
Diane Windham – Water Trails Chair

Upcoming Activities

MLK Day of Service	January 21, 2019
Winter Quarterly Sampling	February 3
River Rendezvous	April 6

See our calendar on www.uown.org for details. The calendar also contains dates for board and committee meetings.
