



Georgia's 2017

CLEAN WATER HEROES

City of Atlanta

CHATTAHOOCHEE & SOUTH RIVERS

City of Atlanta Tackles Stormwater Pollution With Green Solutions

INTRODUCTION:

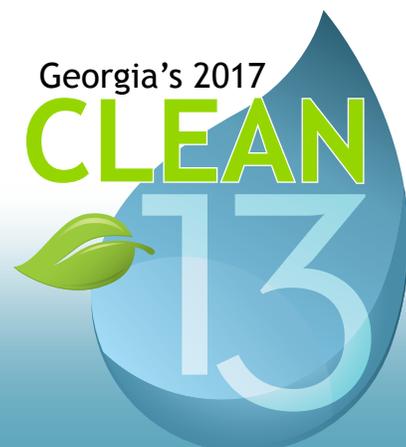
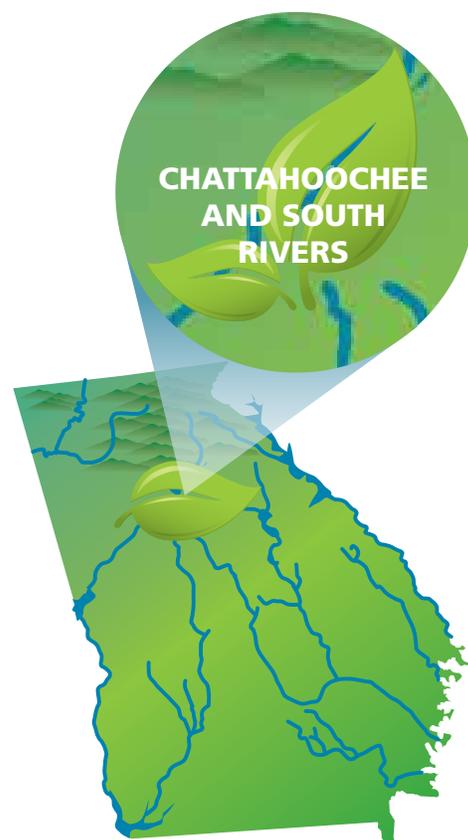
When it rains in Atlanta, it pours... stormwater flushes into streams coursing through the city and into the Chattahoochee and South rivers. That stormwater carries an urban brew of grease, oil, heavy metals, pet waste, household chemicals, lawn and garden fertilizers and salts—stuff that has no business in a natural stream. The result of this polluted runoff? Every stream—from Peachtree to Utoy—in the city of Atlanta fails to meet state stream health standards. Fortunately, the City of Atlanta is taking steps to restore these streams. During the past decade, the City of Atlanta has become a national leader in addressing water pollution issues associated with stormwater runoff, and in 2013, the City Council adopted one of the most far-reaching post-development stormwater management ordinances in the country. Since its adoption, more than 3,500 projects have been permitted using the city's mandatory green infrastructure standards, equating to the removal of approximately 700 million gallons of polluted run off from streams annually.

THE WATER BODY:

Unlike other major metropolitan cities in the U.S., Atlanta does not have a major river flowing right through the middle of it. Instead, the city is drained by numerous small creeks like Nancy, Proctor, Peachtree and Utoy, all of which fail to meet state standards for stream health and all of which feed into the Chattahoochee and South rivers which in turn supply drinking water for hundreds of thousands of people downstream in communities like Macon, LaGrange, West Point and Columbus. The state's longest and most important river, the Chattahoochee supplies drinking water to some 4 million people. The South River feeds the Ocmulgee River, Macon's water source, and is part of Georgia's largest river system—the Altamaha.

THE CLEAN:

In 2013 when the Grand Hyatt Buckhead Hotel in Atlanta looked for ways to save money and practice environmental responsibility, they borrowed a page from the City of Atlanta's recently adopted stormwater ordinance. They installed a rainwater harvesting system on the hotel's 50,000 square-foot roof, and began using that rainwater to flush toilets and operate the hotel's cooling systems. The project resulted in more than \$30,000 in annual savings for the hotel and helped reduce the amount of polluted stormwater coursing to nearby Nancy Creek.





It was innovative projects like this that the City of Atlanta expected to create when in 2013 it adopted its progressive stormwater requirements. The city's ordinance requires green infrastructure on all new and redevelopment projects. The goal is to mimic the natural hydrology of a forest, but in an urban setting. Since adoption of the ordinance, residents have seen rain gardens, bioswales, permeable pavement, and rainwater cisterns pop up all over the city. These projects allow water to soak into the ground, and Atlanta's streams are then recharged with cleaner and cooler water.

There's a porous concrete parking lot at Delia's Chicken Sausage Stand helping save Proctor Creek; homeowners on Leslie Street use cisterns to collect rainwater and slow the flow to nearby Sugar Creek; and permeable pavers at the Urban Market at Howell Mill are doing their part to protect Peachtree Creek.

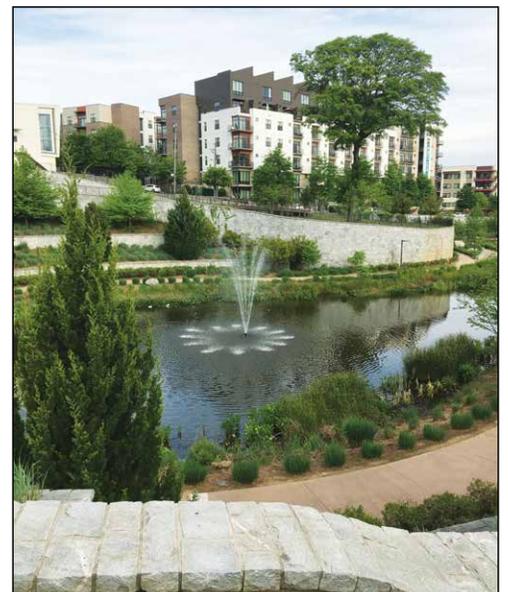
In addition to requiring green infrastructure on new commercial and residential projects, the city itself is leading by example. In 2012, the city addressed stormwater pollution and chronic flooding in the Summerhill, Peoplestown and Mechanicsville neighborhoods by replacing four miles of asphalt streets with porous pavers and stormwater planters. Completed in 2016, the project is the largest roadway project of its kind in the country.

In the city's Old Fourth Ward neighborhood, the city, in partnership with Atlanta Beltline, Inc., transformed a blighted industrial area into a 17-acre park featuring a two-acre stormwater retention pond that reduced flooding in nearby neighborhoods. The project also saved the city close to \$15 million (compared to other infrastructure solutions) and spurred more than \$500 million in private redevelopment.

Atlanta's success with green infrastructure is now serving as an example for others. City staff have worked closely with the Atlanta Regional Commission and Georgia's Environmental Protection Division to develop templates that other Georgia cities and counties can use to adopt similar ordinances.

With its green infrastructure ordinance, Atlanta is reversing the impacts of more than 100 years of urban development on the area's creeks and the Chattahoochee and South rivers. That's good news for the city's downstream neighbors.

"Green infrastructure has proven to be a practical and cost-effective solution to the problems associated with stormwater runoff," said Cory Rayburn, watershed manager with the city. "By combining our own capital improvement efforts with a strong stormwater ordinance, we hope to improve the overall water quality in our streams while providing an aesthetic benefit to surrounding communities."



Top: This green roof on one of Atlanta's downtown buildings is soaking up water and reducing stormwater runoff. Above: This two-acre stormwater retention pond in historic Fourth Ward Park not only alleviated flooding, it also helped spawn more than \$500 million in nearby private redevelopment around the park.



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