Our iconic Carolina Bays and isolated wetlands are at risk. Natural wetlands filter and store water in times of drought, reduce flooding during storms, and provide wildlife habitat. The Legislature’s Isolated Wetlands and Carolina Bay’s Task Force recommends that an inventory of these special places be completed and that an additional portion of the deed stamp be dedicated to the Conservation Bank for their protection by voluntary measures.

While budgets have improved since 2008, more money is needed for DHEC and DNR to monitor water quality, plan for future water supply, and manage the watersheds that enrich and drive our economy. While DHEC has worked recently to address permit backlogs, water quality monitoring program and enforcement staff are inadequately funded. We are concerned that public outreach and stakeholder participation staff have been reduced.

As the recent controversy over the agricultural water withdrawal registrations from the South Fork of the Edisto illustrates, we urgently need a clear statewide water supply plan to balance the need for healthy rivers with economic development. This means (1) finalizing the surface water availability assessments to better quantify our water resources with active stakeholder involvement, (2) approving refined instream minimum flow language in DHEC’s water quality standards (R. 61-68), (3) evaluating the agricultural water withdrawal registration process to assure protection of our valuable rivers and streams.

We urge passage of a Polluter Justice Act to mandate increases in fines for repeat offenders and to treat polluters consistently. A statutorily mandated increase in penalties would insulate DHEC staff from criticism and reduce environmental degradation. The legal clarity of a Polluter Justice Act would deter chronic non-compliance and provide a level playing field for the majority of South Carolina businesses that spend time and money to comply with our environmental laws.

We recommend that DHEC revise its regulations on the spreading of dewatered sludge from human waste (also known as bio-solids) on fields throughout South Carolina. To reduce phosphorus over-loading, run-off pollutants in our streams, and contamination of groundwater wells, DHEC should restrict spreading to less toxic (Class A) waste and monitor and enforce applications more aggressively and consistently.

For more information, visit www.commonagendasc.org

PRIORITY ACTIONS

- Fund the inventory and protection of Carolina Bays and Isolated Wetlands.
- Fund DHEC and DNR to protect and manage our water resources.
- Pass a Polluter Justice Act to protect our clean water and natural resources.
- Strengthen sludge application and treatment regulations.
Contact an Expert on Water

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