

VIEWS *from the* WOODS



Hitchcock Woods
FOUNDATION

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Spring/Summer 2017

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THEY'RE BACK!

Hitchcock Woods Restoration

The Return of the Red-cockaded Woodpeckers

By Pam Gleason

If you ride in the Hitchcock Woods this spring, you might hear a sound that hasn't been heard there for about half a century. This would be the call of red-cockaded woodpeckers chirping out warnings, announcing the fact that they have returned to their roosting sites, or communicating with companions while foraging for food. The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology describes these three different calls as a "raspy skilt" (when they are disturbed), a "chut" (when they are returning to the roosting area,) and a "soft melodious chortling" when they are foraging close to one another. Although red-cockaded woodpeckers once inhabited the Woods, they disappeared in the 1960s and had not been seen there for decades. They are back now.

"They are very vocal and social birds," says Randy Wolcott, a member of the Hitchcock Woods Foundation board of trustees. Randy, who had heard about red-cockaded woodpeckers about 20 years ago, was the driving force behind re-introducing them to the Woods. "You will probably hear them easier than you will see them."

What is so special about red-cockaded woodpeckers? Once common in the Southeast, they were declared an endangered species back in the 1970s, and it is only because of the dedication of many different groups of environmentalists and bird lovers that they

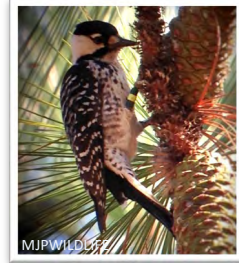
have survived into this century. In November 2017, the Hitchcock Woods Foundation joined the preservation effort when ten birds (often called RCWs) were brought to the Woods and released in five separate recruitment clusters, which are areas with suitable habitat for nesting and foraging.

If you do happen to hear RCWs calling to one another while you are in the Woods, look for a black and white bird about the size of a cardinal. Despite their name, the birds have very little red on them: their most obvious feature is a bold patch of white on their cheeks and a distinctive black cap. Males have a very small, ribbon-like streak of red that runs along the bottom of this cap. Without a pair of binoculars, you probably won't see it. Binoculars might also help you distinguish the endangered RCW from the other, more common species of woodpecker that inhabit the woods, including the red bellied woodpecker, the downy woodpecker, the red-headed woodpecker and the much larger pileated woodpecker.

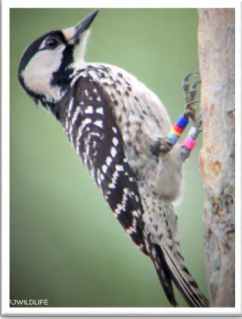
RCWs are specifically adapted to the longleaf pine ecosystem. They live in small groups, usually a breeding pair with one to four "helpers," typically young male offspring from previous years. Highly territorial and non-migratory, they are known as cooperative breeders: all of the birds in a

group work together to care for the breeding pair's brood and to maintain cavity trees where they make their nests. Each group actively patrols its home range, an area of approximately 125 acres of forest. They must vigilantly defend their nests from "floaters" (individual RCW's out searching for vacant nests), and other cavity nesters such as blue birds, flying squirrels, and other woodpeckers. A main factor in saving the RCW has been the restoration of longleaf pine forests, which once covered some 90 million acres from Virginia to Florida. These are woods characterized by tall pines that shade a carpet of wiregrass with very little underbrush. It is an ecosystem that is shaped by fire: for hundreds of years, longleaf forests experienced frequent fires ignited by lightning. Longleaf pines themselves adapted to this, gaining fire resistant trunks and even relying on high temperatures to help their seeds germinate.

The Hitchcock Woods was originally a traditional longleaf forest, but by the 1970s and 1980s, its character had changed: without much in the way of fire, there was too much undergrowth and there were many other species of trees that competed with the pines. This was why the RCWs disappeared: the habitat was no longer suitable for them. *continued on next page.*



THEY'RE BACK! *continued.*



The Hitchcock Woods Foundation started a program of controlled burns in the early 1990s, mostly to clear out years of pine straw and reduce the chances of a catastrophic forest fire that might endanger surrounding neighborhoods. In the mid-1990s, these controlled burns became more scientific after the foundation enlisted the help of biologists from North Carolina to come up with an ecological plan and a prescription to turn the woods back into a traditional longleaf forest. Today, after about 20 years of scientific burning, thinning and other management practices, much of the longleaf ecosystem has been restored.

Once the habitat was again appropriate for red-cockaded woodpeckers, Randy Wolcott wondered if they might return on their own. He was told probably not: although there are RCW populations in several South Carolina forests, the birds do not tend to travel very far from where they are born, and there is so much development around the Woods that there is no convenient, natural corridor to lead them there.

However, a few years ago he learned that it might be possible to have some relocated to the Woods. It was very complicated: RCWs are a federally protected species, so you can't just net them and bring them in. There needed to be a red-cockaded woodpecker management plan created by an RCW biologist. Suitable trees needed to be found for nesting, surrounded by areas that would provide adequate foraging. Then the Hitchcock Woods Foundation needed permission from the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife, and it needed to jump through several regulatory hoops in order to avoid the potential negative consequences of the "incidental take" (any activity that

may cause harm to the RCW, cavity trees, and foraging habitat) of a federally endangered species.

Finally, the birds needed somewhere to live. Most woodpeckers make their homes in dead trees, but RCWs excavate nesting cavities in the heartwood of large living pines. A tree needs to be about 80 years old to be a suitable size, and it can take the birds from one to six years to create a cavity. Each breeding pair and their helpers work together to maintain several cavity trees so every individual has somewhere to sleep at night. In natural circumstances, it obviously takes a pretty long time for a breeding pair to become established as a new group and start laying eggs.

Fortunately, it turns out that RCWs are very happy with artificial cavity boxes. These are hollowed out blocks of cedar with a reinforced, restricted opening just large enough for a red-cockaded woodpecker. The boxes are installed high up in the hearts of large trees and disguised to look like the real thing. When RCWs come across them, they move in quite readily. And so, with the help of a grant from the Longleaf Alliance, a nonprofit based in Alabama, the Hitchcock Woods Foundation obtained 36 of these nesting boxes, which they had installed in nine designated areas. Then they were ready for some birds.

"It took a long time to get everything in place, but then all the stars aligned and it happened very quickly," says Randy. In October of 2016, the foundation was offered 10 birds from the Francis Marion National Forest north of Charleston through a cooperative agreement between state and federal agencies along with various wildlife consultants. Not only would they get 10 birds in 2016, they were promised as many as 10 birds a year for the next four years. They accepted the offer, and in November, a group joined a team of RCW biologists at Francis Marion, netted five pairs of year-old woodpeckers, and brought them back

to the Woods. That evening, they took each bird up a tree and shut it in a cavity for the night. In the morning, when the birds were awake, they opened the doors to the cavities and the birds emerged and flew out.


"And then they were here," says Randy. Four months later, Mark Pavlosky Jr., a RCW biologist with MPJ Wildlife Consulting, LLC based in Aiken, who has been contracted by and working with the Foundation since 2014 to create the Hitchcock Woods red-cockaded woodpecker plan, had some good news. He did a survey that found that at least seven of the 10 birds are still in the Woods. If all goes well, they will start breeding and the first RCW eggs will hatch in mid-May.

"It's very exciting," says Randy. "It is the capstone on our forest management practices. If the woodpeckers come back, it proves that what we have been doing to manage the forest has been the right thing. Our work is allowing us to bring in this endangered species and give it back the home that it always had here. It's a fabulous thing that it has all come together."

What does all this mean for people who enjoy riding and walking in the woods? Are there any new restrictions, or any plans to feature the birds on nature walks or things of that type? For the moment, no. The RCW nesting boxes were placed in trees that are off the trails, and the HWF has always asked that riders and walkers stay on the trails, so they are unlikely to disturb the birds if they follow the rules. While the RCW population is getting established, the Foundation is not publicizing the whereabouts of the nesting trees in order to give the birds some privacy, though it is possible that small groups might be invited to come observe them later on.

If the RCW population re-establishes itself in the Woods, this will mean that the Hitchcock Woods Foundation's efforts have returned the forest to a

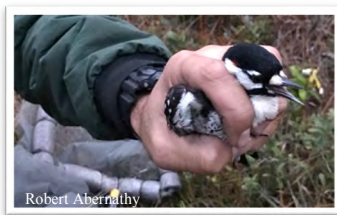
THEY'RE BACK! *continued.*

natural, healthy state. Preserving and protecting the Woods has been a fantastic thing for Aiken and for the people who enjoy its trails and tranquility. It has also been a boon for the environment and a blessing for a sociable black and white bird on its way back from the brink of extinction. 

The RCW's Return to the Woods



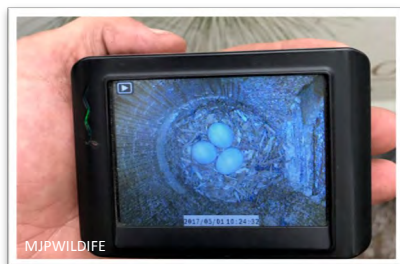
Mark Pavlosky prepares a longleaf pine for an artificial cavity or nesting box.



A one-year old RCW is ready to be moved to its new home.



After placement into the artificial cavity or nesting box, a screen was used to keep the RCW contained as it orients to its new home. The following morning, the screen was removed and the bird emerged.



This Spring, Mother Nature took her course and our newest RCW additions arrived!

2016 FESTIVAL OF THE WOODS

The eighth annual Festival of the Woods welcomed a crowd of nearly three hundred Woods lovers. Guest speaker and Award-winning Conservationist and Author, Rhett Johnson, presented "*The Fire Forest; Managing the Jewels in the Crown*" as a tribute to the significance of the Foundation's longleaf restoration efforts. Former Trustee and Festival Honorary Chair, Sandra Tucker was recognized for her many contributions to the Foundation, and the winners from the 7th Annual Célestine Eustis essay contest were presented. Festival goers enjoyed exploring artifacts from the cultural resources survey of the Woods and trying their hand at shooting a blow gun, a tool utilized by Native Americans who once used the land we now call Hitchcock Woods. The Hitchcock Woods Foundation would like to thank the volunteers, partners, sponsors and friends who made this event a success and so much fun!



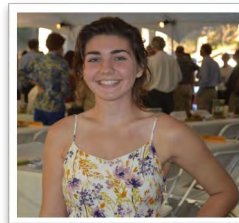
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First Prize Winner, Célestine Eustis Essay Contest

Zerrin Varnadore, age 17 South Aiken HS, Cross-country



"As sweet summer sweat rolls down our faces and our hearts burst rhythmically in our chests, we see the lazy slopes of golden pine straw, narrow dirt trails and wide, sandy aisles. We see cliffs of red stone, clear rivers climbing over pebbles and railroads

trekking through the untamed wild. We see deer with the early sunshine basking their flanks, we hear squirrels scamper under foliage and we are greeted by horses and their friendly riders. Even with over 2,100 acres, this place is almost hidden, accessible by unknown back roads and neighborhood ends. But for anyone who crosses the threshold between bustling city and wooded tranquility, they become aware of the unspoken placidity known as Hitchcock Woods."

Reserve Winner, Célestine Eustis Essay Contest

Giselle Gidley, age 7



"My family and I just moved to Aiken last February, and the woods was one of the first place my parents took me. Being new here, I didn't have many friends yet, but the tall pine trees hugged me and welcomed me into the delicious smelling

woods. Everywhere I looked my eyes saw beauty all around. My mind could imagine the ancient Indians working, playing and hunting deer to feed their children. I sat down on a rock and dreamed I was an Indian child collecting wood for a fire. Velvet seed pods, vines, colorful rocks and animal footprints are all part of my jungle temple, where we give thanks to God for creating us and the earth where the woods grow."

THE 101ST AIKEN HORSE SHOW MARCH 31—APRIL 2, 2017



The Foundation ushered in the next century of the magnificent Aiken Horse Show Tradition, started by Mrs. Hitchcock in 1916, in grand style. Visitors and participants from a record twenty one states made the trek to enjoy what we refer to as *Aiken's Masters*. And the show spirit, decor, grounds, exhibitors, and Mother Nature did not disappoint!

The Foundation would like to congratulate all the winners and thank the army of volunteers, sponsors, and exhibitors who made the 101st Aiken Horse Show a beautiful success. We simply could not honor this tradition at this level of grandeur without you!

Visit www.AikenHorseShow.com to see the 101st Aiken Horse Show winners and photo galleries.



In honor of the 101st Aiken Horse Show the winners of the Costume Class division dress as the 101 Dalmatians.



Very creative thinking and art work makes the Costume Class a favorite among spectators.



The Ladies Sidesaddle class is a spectator favorite, right down to the end of the show.

2016 AIKEN HORSE SHOW CORPORATE SPONSORS

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WOODS EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

The Woods serve as a classroom for adventurers of all ages

Girls Scouts Learning in the Woods



Woods Superintendent, Bennett Tucker, leads Girl Scouts through Hitchcock Woods as part of the Aiken Land Conservancy's Young Conservationist program.

Students Enjoy a Field Day in the Woods



Foundation Trustee, Connie Young, introduces Millbrook Elementary children to the Woods on a hike from the Tea Cottage entrance to the Show Grounds.



Students learned about the ecology and management of the Woods and the artifacts discovered during the Foundation's Cultural Resources Survey.

Science Education Enrichment Day (S.E.E.D)



The 31st annual S.E.E.D event at USC-Aiken welcomed over 3600 youth and families. Visitors to the Hitchcock Woods Foundation exhibit enjoyed learning how the age of a tree is determined, and about the plants and animals that live in the Woods.

Celebrating Earth Day



The Foundation exhibited at the City of Aiken's Annual Earth Day Event after helping to host the People Chase Run through the Woods. Trustee, Dr. Brisbin, delighted visitors with his favorite Woods resident, the Eastern Box Turtle.

Visitors from Across the Pond



The International Dendrology Society headquartered in England, included Hitchcock Woods on their tour of eastern America last fall. Foundation Forestry Committee member, Bob McCartney and Woods Superintendent, Bennett Tucker helped guide the group.



CÉLESTINE EUSTIS ESSAY CONTEST

Entries will be received until July 31, 2017

Area students and young writers are invited to participate in the seventh annual Célestine Eustis essay contest. The winner receives a cash prize of \$500 and the reserve winner receives a cash prize of \$100. Both will be recognized at the 9th annual Festival of the Woods on Friday, September 22, 2017.

A panel of judges will review all entries and select recipients whose appreciation of the Woods is in the tradition of Célestine Eustis, who purchased land in the pine forests of Aiken more than 130 years ago and had a passion for the flora, fauna and serenity of the Woods. Célestine’s niece was Louise Eustis (Mrs. Thomas Hitchcock). She helped to ensure that her family and future generations could enjoy what we know today as the Hitchcock Woods.

For more information about the Célestine Eustis essay contest please call 803-642-0528 or www.hitchcockwoods.org.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Hitchcock Family’s original gift of land did not come with an endowment.

By making a planned Legacy gift you can help sustain and ensure the Foundation’s future work.

For more information about planned giving call the Foundation office at 803.641.0528 or visit www.hitchcockwoods.org



SPORT AND SUPPORT



Stop by Birds & Butterflies on Laurens Street to purchase Hitchcock Woods merchandise.



Check out the new Red-cockaded woodpecker hat. *Cash or checks appreciated.*

A MAY NIGHT UNDER A STAR-FILLED SKY

CHALK CLIFFS, HITCHCOCK WOODS

By Stephanie Wilds

Based on photography by Shelly Marshall Schmidt, this quilt depicts an iconic, and environmentally important, location in Hitchcock Woods on a May night under a star-filled sky. In my particular form of textile art, I enjoy the challenge of realistically interpreting landscape photography within the limitations of fabric and thread, incorporating traditional techniques with a modicum of modern technology.

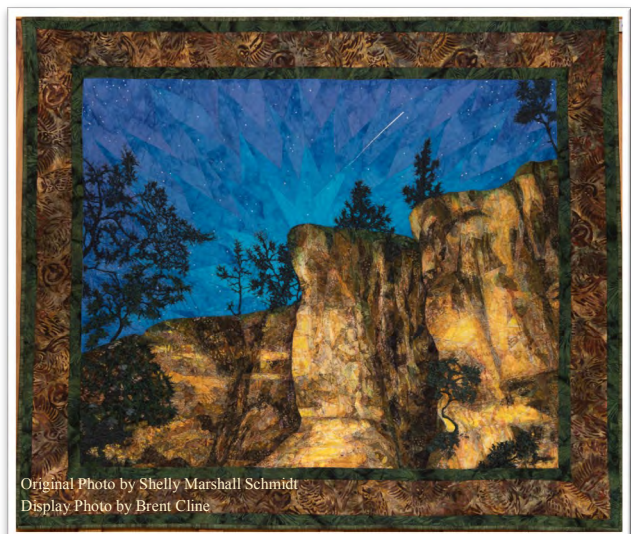
The techniques used in this “fabrication” are quite various. The sky (of custom hand-dyed cotton fabric) and the cliffs (of commercial print and batik quilting fabrics) are both machine-pieced, with the cliffs later hand-appliquéd in place. Pine trees are constructed using tulle, water-soluble stabilizer and free-motion “thread painting”, and similarly hand-appliquéd and embroidered. Stars are hand-embroidered using glow-in-the-dark thread. The cliffs are also manipulated with fabric dyes and deColourant to more closely resemble the original photograph, and the whole is machine-quilted to accentuate terrain. An estimated one hundred hours or more went into it. The Chalk Cliffs quilt measures 49” x 41.” Visit Stephanie at www.wildsfabrications.com

THE LANDSCAPE QUILT IS ON DISPLAY AT THE GREEN HOUSE AND WILL BE RAFFLED TO BENEFIT THE FOUNDATION.

ONLY ONE HUNDRED TICKETS WILL BE SOLD FOR \$100.00 PER TICKET.

WINNER WILL BE ANNOUNCED AT THE FESTIVAL OF THE WOODS.

Tickets can be purchased by calling or visiting the Green House located at the South Boundary entrance.



Original Photo by Shelly Marshall Schmidt
Display Photo by Brent Cline

WELCOME THE FOUNDATION'S NEW CHAIRMAN



PATRICIA E. COREY and her husband, Alan, moved to Aiken in 1985. Both had family connections so had visited multiple times – Alan since he was a small child and Pat since late 1970s. A large part of their experience with Aiken was their love of the Hitchcock Woods, so when they purchased a home, they chose one as close to the Woods as they could get. After moving to Aiken, Pat became involved with civic activities. She chaired the committee that was tasked with writing the Historic Preservation Ordinance for the City of Aiken. Once it was adopted, she was appointed by the City of Aiken to the first Historic Preservation Commission where she also served as chair. She eventually stepped down to join the Solicitor's Office of the Second Judicial District of the State of South Carolina where she practiced as a Solicitor for a number of years. Pat also practiced as a Guardian ad litem in Family Court and as the Deputy Solicitor for Aiken Public Safety prior to her retirement. Pat became a trustee of the Hitchcock Woods Foundation in the mid 1990s and has been actively involved with the Foundation since.

WELCOME THE FOUNDATION'S NEW TRUSTEES



ELIZABETH (BIZ) CAREY has enjoyed equestrian activities in the Hitchcock Woods, on and off, since her early twenties. She has been an avid member of the Aiken Hounds and has exercised her steeplechasers over the Ridge Mike Track. Biz has served on the Equine Committee for the City Council, the Advisory Board of the Aiken Land Conservancy, and is a Board Member of the National Steeplechase Foundation. A retired small animal veterinarian, Biz now owns and runs Check Mark Stables, in Aiken. She races and breeds flat and steeplechase thoroughbreds. Biz is excited about the re-introduction of the Red-cockaded Woodpeckers to the Woods and is currently serving on the Wildlife committee where she can contribute to the Foundation's efforts to restore animal and plant populations to the Woods.



JANE HOTTENSEN is married with three grown children and has been a resident of New York for 35 years. A graduate of Skidmore College, Jane has an MBA from Boston University and is a graduate of the New York School of Interior Design. *Folly* on Laurens Street in downtown Aiken, was opened by Jane and it reflects her design talents with home and personal accessories. In 2007, Jane and her husband Bob traveled to Aiken and purchased Crossways, a historic Aiken home on the National Historic Register. Recently, the Hottensens completed an extensive renovation of Ridgeley Hall on Berrie Road. Jane serves on several boards, including the Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame and the Joye in Aiken music festival. She is a member of the Millbrook Hunt, the Aiken Hounds, Mashomack Fish and Game Preserve and the Palmetto Golf Club. Jane's exquisite decorating talents can be seen at the Aiken Horse Show.



JOANNA DUNN SAMSON is a retired attorney, project consultant and environmental agency administrator, where she specialized in the procurement and development of large infra-structure projects. From 2003-2006, she served as the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Protection in New Jersey. Joanna is particularly interested in the protection and maintenance of the Hitchcock Woods, as well as the sustainability of the Foundation for many generations to come. Currently, Joanna is the President of the Aiken Land Conservancy, the VP of the Friends of the Aiken County Animal Shelter, and a Master of Foxhounds in Connecticut. Joanna and her husband, David, live in Aiken.

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*The Hitchcock Woods
Foundation would like
to thank the
donors and volunteers
who make our work
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THE MISSION OF THE HITCHCOCK WOODS FOUNDATION IS TO:
Protect and preserve the Hitchcock Woods in a natural and ecologically healthy state, maintain and manage historic and traditional equestrian and pedestrian uses, and foster education and research on the history and resources of the Woods.


Hitchcock Woods
FOUNDATION
P.O. Box 1702
Aiken, SC 29802



STORMWATER

CONTINUES TO DAMAGE AND THREATEN HITCHCOCK WOODS

The Hitchcock Woods Foundation Board of Trustees has unanimously pinpointed stormwater runoff from the City of Aiken to be the greatest threat to Hitchcock Woods.

WHO: The City of Aiken has been directing and discharging most, if not all, of its stormwater runoff into the Woods (private property) for decades, via underground pipes. A city task force (that includes Foundation staff and trustees) was recently formed and a consultant hired to propose solutions to stop the damage to the health and integrity of Hitchcock Woods¹ caused by City stormwater runoff.

WHAT: *Stormwater runoff, a leading source of water pollution nationwide,² is generated from rain that flows over hard surfaces such as streets and parking lots, rather than soaking into the ground.* The City of Aiken's stormwater runoff is directed and discharged into the Woods at a high volume and velocity after every rain, and is causing damage to the Woods at an accelerated and alarming rate. One rain discharged 35 million gallons of stormwater runoff into the Woods through a 10' diameter pipe in a nine hour period, and at its peak, at a rate of 100,000 gallons per minute!³

Damage to the Woods caused by city stormwater runoff includes:

Massive Erosion: Woods real estate is lost after every rain. An area once passable by foot has been eroded into a 70' high and 25' wide canyon. Other areas in the Woods are in danger of becoming canyons of this scale.

Sedimentation: Silt and sediment from large scale erosion has smothered and killed many bottomland hardwood trees and has filled in and destroyed wetlands in the Woods.

Pollutants: City stormwater runoff picks up and flushes trash, chemicals, sediment and bacteria into the Woods that is harmful to the Woods health, ecology and pristine beauty.

Impeding management: Woods areas eroded from stormwater runoff are so fragile that invasive species cannot be mitigated in these areas until the damage ceases and healing can begin.

WHERE: Stormwater runoff from over 3,800 acres of property within the City of Aiken municipal limits is directed and discharged into the Woods.⁴ (*Refer to the map on the back of this page for the sub-watersheds that drain into Hitchcock Woods*)

WHY: In the absence of any significant City stormwater runoff management alternatives combined with the City of Aiken's growth since 1950, the sheer volume and velocity of stormwater runoff being directed and discharged into the Woods has grown to a devastating level.

WHEN: City stormwater runoff is directed and discharged into the Woods via underground pipes at a high volume and velocity after every rain event.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Contact your City Council representative and elected officials and tell them that redesigning the City of Aiken's antiquated stormwater runoff management system and protecting Hitchcock Woods must be a **top priority**. Visit <https://www.cityofaikensc.gov/government/city-council/> and <https://www.aikencountysc.gov/SGovernment> You can also get involved by attending council meetings and writing to local papers. Solutions that absorb and direct City stormwater runoff away from the Woods rather than into the Woods, must be incorporated.

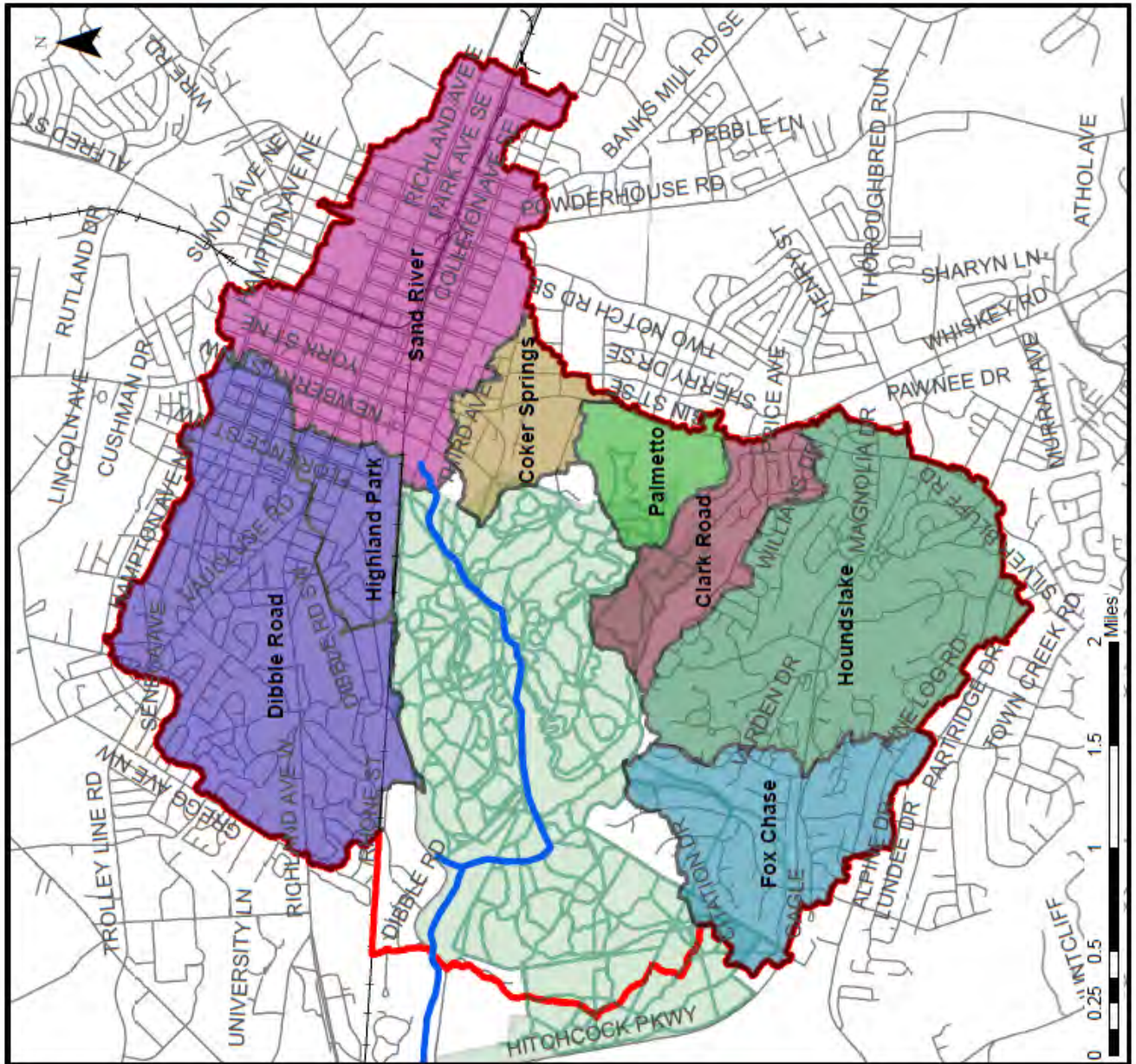
¹ Hitchcock Woods is privately owned and managed by the Hitchcock Woods Foundation, a 501(c) (3) non-profit funded by donor support. The Foundation receives no operating support from municipal, county, state or federal taxes.

² Source: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/stormwater-runoff/>

³ Source: Clemson University Sand River Hydrology Project.

⁴ Source: McCormick Taylor, City stormwater consultant.

Hitchcock Woods Total Watershed



Legend

- Sand River
- Hitchcock Woods Total Watershed
- Hitchcock Woods Property
- Hitchcock Woods Trails

Hitchcock Woods Sub-Watersheds

Name	Area (acres)
Sand River	1,109
Dibble Road	1,488
Coker Springs	253
Clark Road	342
Palmetto	219
Houndslake	1,204
Highland Park*	227
Fox Chase	597

Hitchcock Woods Sub-Watershed Total Area: 5,212 acres

Developed by:
 Clemson University Sand River Hydrology Project
 Dr. Christopher Post, Principal Investigator
 Kelly Kruzner, Project Engineer
 7/7/2017