

## Our cherished asset

By Michelle Lewis, Co-Chair Black Scenic River Advisory Council



Mill Street Landing, Kingstree, SC, 10/6/15. Photo Courtesy Louis Drucker

Our watershed has seen multiple flooding disasters over the past few years, with the October 2015 flood being one of the costliest in South Carolina's history. As many of us recall, the funnel of rain from Hurricane Joaquin raised the Black River to 22.65 feet, 10.65 *feet* above flood stage, as measured at the Kingstree gauge. Then just one year later in October 2016, Hurricane Matthew resulted in the fourth highest water level ever recorded on Black River in Kingstree at 16.41 feet.

These two flooding events as well as Hurricane Florence in 2018 – and some landowners would look back even further to the heavy rains in Summer of 2013 and the ice storm of February 2014 - all competed as worst weather disaster for our region. Thankfully, we have a local asset working in our favor to protect our homes, businesses and communities: Black River's floodplain forests and swamps.

These forested wetlands and associated fringe pine-hardwood forests protect and recharge water resources by naturally restricting development, capturing and dispersing debris and silt, filtering agricultural runoff, and **minimizing flood damage**. Conservation efforts by landowners and organizations along the upper reaches of Black River in Clarendon, Williamsburg and Georgetown County have protected over 20,000 acres through conservation easements and land preserves to connect these core protected areas.

“Wetlands function as natural sponges that trap and slowly release surface water, rain, snowmelt, groundwater and flood waters. Trees, root mats, and other wetland vegetation also slow the speed of flood waters and distribute them more slowly over the floodplain. This combined water storage and braking action lowers flood heights and reduces erosion. Wetlands within and downstream of urban areas are particularly valuable, counteracting the greatly increased rate and volume of surface-water runoff from pavement and buildings. The holding capacity of wetlands helps control floods and prevents crop damage from flooding. Preserving and restoring wetlands, together with other water retention actions, can often provide the level of flood control otherwise provided by expensive dredge operations and levees.”

Source: <http://water.epa.gov/type/wetlands/flood.cfm>

Keeping Black River's floodplain healthy and intact protects more than just an aesthetically pleasing asset; it protects our public safety, our local economy, and our quality of life. Your Black Scenic River Advisory Council works with a growing network of partners that include local government representatives, Open Space Institute, Winyah Rivers Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Pee Dee Land Trust, Coastal Conservation League, Main Street Kingstree, and others, to protect this cherished asset. We invite your involvement in protecting this valuable resource.