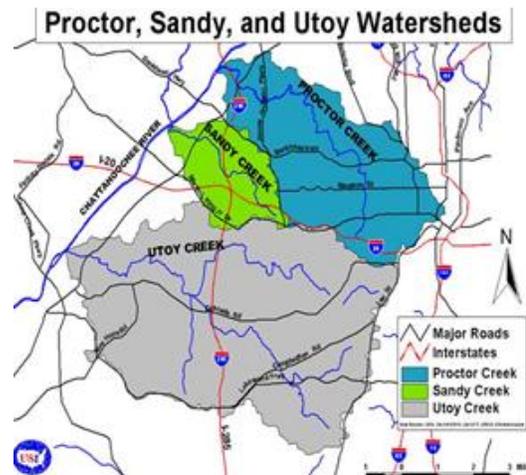


Trash Reduction in Proctor Creek and Beyond: Reducing Plastic Waste in our Urban Waters and preventing their impact on our Oceans!

By Daryl Haddock West Atlanta Watershed Alliance/Proctor Creek Ambassador

National Geographic reported 5 years ago that there are 5.25 trillion pieces of plastic debris in the world's oceans. Most of this material comes from land, transported by stormwater. Locally, Proctor Creek is one of the most impaired waterways in the metro Atlanta area. The Proctor Creek Watershed is home to about 38 neighborhoods, including some of the most economically-disadvantaged and underserved areas in the city. The watershed has been troubled by frequent flooding, erosion, stormwater runoff, pollution from illegal dumping, and sewer overflows. The Proctor Creek Watershed is a tributary to the Chattahoochee River Watershed, the smallest in the nation to serve a major metropolitan area! Its waters eventually flow to the Gulf of Mexico.



Residents and stakeholders are taking action to turn around years of neglect and disinvestment and help restore the watershed and protect its residents. This effort is coordinated by the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council and other local leaders. West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA) and their partners led a community call for a Trash Trap Network in the Proctor Creek watershed. It took almost a decade to complete, but the Trash Trap Network has become a reality!

In 2019, the first trash interrupt technology installed was an Osprey Initiative LLC's "Litter Gitter." Litter Gitters are small-stream litter collection devices that use floating booms to guide trash into a collection container. The network now includes 5-6 of these devices, placed in various tributaries throughout the watershed. The proposed Proctor Park site is now the permanent home of the Bandalong Litter Trap. The Bandalong Litter Trap, produced by Stormwater Systems Inc., is a large, industrial-grade aluminum system that uses the water's current to guide debris into a litter trap.

The Bandalong and Litter Gitters are visually inspected and cleared of trash and debris weekly and after any large rain event. Trash is removed with nets and by hand (using gloves) and collected in trash bags. Maintenance team members and volunteers then sort, weigh, and record data about the trash. This data allows WAWA to identify litter trends in specific parts of the watershed which guide their strategies for outreach to the



community. Eventually, they will reach out to local businesses to help prevent waste from entering Proctor Creek; at the source.

The Atlanta Trash Trap Network has collectively removed a total of 454.22 pounds of recyclables and 1,040.52 pounds of trash from the watershed through the end of June 2020. While the Network clears the waterways, it has also been the source of jobs and educational opportunities for the community. Groundwork Atlanta, a

local chapter of Groundworks USA and Chattahoochee Riverkeepers, coordinates operation and maintenance of the Litter Gitters and Bandalong, as an opportunity to increase green jobs and local engagement. Their collaboration with Georgia Trade-Up, alongside the trash trap manufacturers, enabled the training of local crews on maintenance for each technology and methods to collect data.

WAWA is also providing educational tours to the trash traps, with support from Groundwork Atlanta. The project goal was offering environmental education tours as field trips to the Proctor Creek Watershed for high school students during the 2019 – 2020 school year. Despite the pandemic, WAWA has completed several trash trap tours hosting seventy-five Metro Atlanta high school students.



Georgia Institute of Technology Innovation and Design Collaborative (Design Bloc) has also committed to support WAWA's plastic upcycling research through a yearlong student-driven service-project. Design Bloc engaged Proctor Creek community members, hearing their insights, needs, and values to determine: (1) Who is directly impacted by the plastic pollutants placed into the creek and/or (2) What would they like to see these community-sourced plastics be directed into, that would positively impact their immediate environment. WAWA participated in their Fall design research presentation and await their final design projects next semester.