Land Use and the Ashley River District


Population Trends: Dorchester County population increased by nearly 200% from 1970 to 1990. Much of the growth occurred near the Ashley River District.

Growth Projections: Urban growth predictions estimate that sprawl will consume 868 square miles of the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester (BCD) area by 2030.

Resources at risk: Cultural/Historic Sites 57%, Archeological Sites 36%, Freshwater Wetlands 35%, Tidal Creeks 41%.

Future Outlook: South Carolina is one of the nation’s top retirement areas. New residents continue to be attracted to the many benefits of the Lowcountry. Preservation and conservation of the Ashley Scenic River and Historic District will ensure that this exceptional legacy lives on for all residents.

The Ashley Scenic River Advisory Council is composed of local citizens representing river-bordering landowners, river users, and community groups with interests in the river.

The Legislature designated the Ashley as a State Scenic River in 1998. The Advisory Council was formed in 1999 and the Council completed the Ashley Scenic River Management Plan in 2002.

The Ashley Scenic River Management Plan expresses the Council’s goals and recommendations, which are a product of a two-year community input process. The Council has no regulatory authority and their goals are pursued primarily through education and advocacy.

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References: BCD COG, University of SC, SC DNR; BCD COG; Clemson University Strom Thurmond Institute; Presentation given by Jeff Allen, Clemson University Strom Thurmond Institute.
The Ashley Scenic River is steeped in historical culture and archeology. Named after one of the Lords Proprietors granted charter to the Carolina Colony, the Ashley River flows 36 miles from Cypress Swamp to the Charleston Harbor. The area serves as an exceptional tourist attraction, economic asset, and historical, cultural, and natural relic for the Lowcountry. It contains 26 separate sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Some of the significant historical sites are listed below.

**Colonial Dorchester State Historic Site**
One of the earliest villages, founded in 1697, prospered as inland trade center for over 100 years.

**Drayton Hall**—Completed in 1742, this 630-acre historic site and plantation house has survived the Revolutionary and Civil Wars intact.

**Magnolia Plantation & Gardens**—Ancestral home and site of the oldest major public garden in America, this three-century old home has been in the same family since 1671.

**Middleton Place**—This 18th-century plantation houses the country’s oldest landscaped gardens and was home to four important generations of Middletons, including a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

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**Nature**

The Ashley River contains an assemblage of natural resources that provide countless biological, aesthetic, recreational, and cultural benefits to the Lowcountry region. The Scenic River is also a source of community and historical pride and plays a significant role in attracting new residents and economic activity to the area. The Ashley is a tidal river, a dynamic system where saltwater and freshwater ecosystems shift continually. The freshwater zone of the River supports forested wetlands dominated by bald cypress, tupelo, sweet gum, red maple, and willows. The bottomland forest transitions to riparian marshland, dominated by pickerel weed, bull rushes, and cattails. Further downstream, brackish water becomes saline and black needlerush and smooth cordgrass emerge as the Ashley opens up into the Charleston Harbor.

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**Wildlife**

There are many critical and endangered species common in the Ashley River region. Typical wildlife includes:

- Kingfishers ~ wood ducks ~ red-winged blackbirds ~ ospreys ~ anhingas ~ herons ~ turtles ~ snakes ~ alligators ~ crabs ~ pelicans ~ otters ~ wood storks ~ egrets ~ eagles ~ owls ~