



Jasper County South Carolina

May 9, 2024

Andrew Fulghum, Jasper County Administrator, 843-717-3690, afulghum@jaspercountysc.gov

Jasper County earns \$1.25 million grant to study, improve stormwater drainage, protect waterways

Armed with a \$1.25 million FEMA grant, Jasper County leaders are launching a major study of stormwater management and ways to reduce contamination of area waters from current and future development.

Of the funding, 75 percent -- \$937,500 -- will come from federal sources with the remaining 25 percent -- \$312,500 -- from Jasper County.

“At the County Council level, we look forward to this much-needed project to help guide our policies and governance related to land planning and development. The Lowcountry landscape draws you in, and we must be vigilant in protecting what we have, before it is too late,” Jasper County Council Chair Marty Sauls said.

The South Carolina Emergency Management Division is administering the grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency through the “Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Program.”

“For decades, we have wrestled with questions about stormwater drainage and management, about how to protect our communities while at the same time protecting our waterways and our future,” said Jasper County Administrator Andrew Fulghum.

“This study is designed to answer those questions and to help us prioritize projects to help. It is critical that we invite to the table our neighboring counties and municipalities. I applaud our Jasper County staff for thinking regionally about this grant project, as water knows no political boundaries. We are all in this together,” he said.

“We have been working toward this grant for some time,” Fulghum said. “Our state partners have been a huge help, and the whole project took a giant leap forward when our Jasper County

Council enacted a temporary moratorium last year on development across a large portion of the county to give us time to look at all of our land-planning efforts, including stormwater drainage.”

The development halt applied to large residential subdivisions, commercial development, and signage within the Euhaw Broad River Area of northern Jasper County. Areas affected included along the Broad River, Highways 170, 462, Bees Creek Road, and the area known as the Okeetee Club.

Over the past two years, Jasper County has seen progress on the \$42 million widening of US Highway 17 through the county, construction of a new fire station at Marsh Cove, reviewed the state’s scheduled widening of Interstate 95 through the county and the continued expansion and improvements at the Ridgeland-Claude Dean Airport.

The 2020 Census showed Jasper County grew by 28 percent over the previous decade, from 24,948 residents to 31,925 in 2020.

“This is another example of Jasper County taking a regional approach to environmental challenges -- improving stormwater drainage in developed areas complements regional land protection in the undeveloped areas, protecting our region’s waterways, our view sheds, our entire ecosystem downstream.” said Kate Schaefer, the Beaufort County Open Land Trust’s director of land protection.

According to the FEMA grant, the stormwater drainage study must be completed by Jan. 31, 2027 unless an extension is approved.

The first steps, said Jasper County Director of Emergency Services Russell Wells, will be to identify and initiate a task force comprised of County, municipal and neighboring jurisdictions. This task force will be a guiding team for the consulting engineering firm.

“We envision the taskforce empowering collaboration to address how stormwater management can protect our vital natural resources and embrace growth and development within our communities,” he said.

“Next, we will secure an engineering firm specializing in hydrology. The firm will convene studies to confirm and identify how water traverses the county and flows to the ocean,” Wells said. “Additionally, they will assess current stormwater infrastructure to identify where improvements are needed.

“With the identification of these projects, the engineering team will prioritize them for the County to consider and then seek additional federal funding opportunities, as well as develop a comprehensive stormwater management plan and other documents necessary to enact stormwater environmental protections for our residents and visitors,” Wells said.

The stormwater drainage study in Jasper County comes on the heels of Beaufort County and other parties buying the 4,409-acre Gregorie Neck tract in Jasper County. Beaufort County

Council approved a \$1 million expenditure from the county's Green Space Program for the conservation of the property, which was recently purchased by The Nature Conservancy.

Similar to Jasper County's concerns about stormwater management, the Gregorie Neck property is important to Beaufort County because of its proximity to major waterways that flow into the county and the Atlantic Ocean.

END