



# EASLEY COMBINED UTILITIES

*A Community Tradition*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## SC Representative Helps Secure \$2.2 Million for Upper Saluda Watershed

EASLEY, SC, USA April 23, 2026 – \$2.2 million in funding has been awarded to [Easley Combined Utilities](#) (ECU) and [Save Our Saluda](#) for streambank restoration and conservation along the Saluda River.

Saluda Lake is the raw water source for ECU customers; ECU has actively worked to protect this drinking water source by reducing sedimentation for improved quality and capacity. In 2017, ECU and Save Our Saluda partnered to adopt a proactive management approach to reduce siltation in the watershed through restoration and conservation efforts. Through this partnership, with support from [Naturaland Trust](#), these organizations have leveraged local funds and grants to begin protecting and restoring the Saluda River basin, helping conserve over 2,200 acres of land.

### History of Funding Request and Support from Collins

As the Upper Saluda watershed is extremely large and this is a long-term project, ECU sought support from Representative Neal Collins, South Carolina District 5, to advance an appropriation allowing increased flexibility for ECU to match available grants and partnering opportunities within the Saluda Basin. Prior to the 2024 legislative session and with the guidance of Save Our Saluda, ECU requested \$6.1M for watershed management. Collins submitted the request to the State Finance Committee and actively lobbied the importance of the project goals – specifically the importance of reliable water supply in the upstate of South Carolina. Originally, the plan was that if the State contributed \$3 million, an additional \$3.1 million federal grant would complete the balance. Collins was able to secure \$2.2 million of state funds, awarded in December of 2024. Unfortunately, the federal fulfillment of the \$3.1 million was retracted based on shifting program priorities.

The current \$2.2 million, largely secured as a result of Collins’s petitioning, includes match money for other grants, donations from partners to secure property, or for individual streambank restoration projects. Federal government shutdowns have stalled opportunities to utilize matching money; however, conservation opportunities and streambank restoration projects have been identified and are currently being evaluated and prioritized. The funds will be fully utilized in the near future to make the greatest possible impact.

Ultimately, these funds will help ECU and its partners preserve upstate South Carolina’s natural resources, protecting them for future generations. These efforts also serve to protect a water resource that directly serves ECU’s 40,000 customers and the three water districts that rely on ECU for water supply. Through Collins’s



*Current Save Our Saluda Project Example: Before*



*Current Save Our Saluda Project Example: After*



# EASLEY COMBINED UTILITIES

*A Community Tradition*

diligent work to secure the funding, ECU can leverage additional grant funds and make a positive impact on the watershed while limiting the need for future rate increases to fund dredging operations or other reactive projects.

“Neal has been a steadfast advocate for the protection of our water source, from the streams to the lake. Preserving and repairing our streambanks is a monumental task, with monumental costs. As we strive to maximize available funds, the State’s financial assistance of \$2.2M bolsters our efforts tremendously. Neal played a pivotal role in securing this funding, and we are forever grateful,” said Andy Sevic, General Manager of ECU.

## **Future Watershed Updates**

ECU will continue to share about the funding allocation and future projects to protect the Upper Saluda watershed via their social media channels (primarily Facebook and Instagram), quarterly digital newsletter, and website. For questions or concerns regarding the Upper Saluda watershed, please contact Melanie Ruhlman at [info@safeoursaluda.org](mailto:info@safeoursaluda.org). Ruhlman, Watershed Manager of the Upper Saluda watershed above Saluda Lake, and president of Save Our Saluda, is a dedicated advocate and will identify and oversee projects in an effort to maximize all available funding.

## **SAVE OUR SALUDA**

Save Our Saluda (SOS) is a nonprofit watershed organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the Upper Saluda Watershed. We promote clean and sustainable river flows, identify threats facing the river and its tributaries, and seek effective solutions in cooperation with partnering organizations and volunteers. For more information about Save Our Saluda, please visit [saveoursaluda.org](http://saveoursaluda.org).

## **NATURALAND TRUST**

Following the momentum of our founder, Tommy Wyche, Naturaland Trust focuses its conservation efforts in the Cherokee Foothills and Blue Ridge escarpment area of South Carolina. Protecting critical land linkages ensures that the watersheds, woodlands, and unique ecoregions of the Upstate will remain in their natural state and open to public use. Naturaland Trust currently owns and manages over 9,000 acres and has played a direct role in conserving and protecting another 100,000+ acres. We work with willing sellers and our partners to create a lasting legacy of South Carolina's unique mountain landscape through fee simple acquisition. Often, Naturaland Trust steps in to protect key properties on behalf of state, county and federal agencies. For more information about Naturaland Trust, please visit [naturalandtrust.org](http://naturalandtrust.org).

## **EASLEY COMBINED UTILITIES**

Easley Combined Utilities (ECU) provides a reliable supply of water, wastewater, and electrical service at the best possible value to the customers of Easley, South Carolina and surrounding areas. ECU is a municipally owned utility, established under the laws of the state of South Carolina. Easley residents and businesses have a voice in the management and operation of their utilities, ensuring that the city of Easley remains an excellent place to live and work. For more information about ECU, please visit [easleyutilities.com](http://easleyutilities.com) or call 864-859-4013.

###



***EASLEY COMBINED UTILITIES***

---

*A Community Tradition*

**Editorial Only Contact:**

Katherine Elrod, SEEKER  
864-209-1770  
katherine@seekSKR.com