

Deadline nears to comment on May River 'action plan'

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By [Frank Morris](#)

Act fast if you want to comment on the draft version of Bluffton's May River Watershed Action Plan.

The 30-day public review period for the draft, a blueprint aimed at restoring the May River headwaters to shellfish harvesting standards, ends at the close of the town's business day at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Town Stormwater Engineer Ron Bullman, who is guiding the project, last week said a few comments have been received and he expects more.

The 88-page document is posted on the town's website at www.townofbluffton.sc.gov

On the home page, under "news and announcements" click the link labeled "May River Watershed Action Plan Public Review."

The direct address is <http://townofbluffton.sc.gov/mayriver/mayriverwatershedactionplan.htm>

Bullman asked that all comments or questions concerning the document be emailed to him at rbullman@townofbluffton.com

"We certainly appreciate any and all feedback you are willing to offer," Bullman said when the document was released for public review. "Please understand that this is a 95 percent complete document and will be finalized only after we receive and review comments from the public review period."

The Town Council has made restoration and protection of the May River for shellfishing and recreation a top priority.

According to Bullman, "This document will serve as our guiding document for all future May River water quality initiatives. As such, it is vital that this document be complete and accurate. Therefore, we appreciate all stakeholders' input prior to its completion."

There will be more time for public input during the committee and Town Council review process.

After comments are analyzed for revisions, Bullman said staff will seek approval recommendation from the May River Technical Advisory Committee, May River

Waterbody Management Plan Implementation Committee and Bluffton Planning Commission. A public workshop will also be held. He said unannounced dates were tentative and may change based on the amount of comments received.

“Finally, we will seek Town Council approval in October,” he said.

The town’s Growth Management Department announced Nov. 24, 2010, it had hired a consulting team led by MacTec Engineering and Consulting Inc., a nationwide company headquartered in Alpharetta, Ga., for \$69,400, to draft the plan with town staff input.

Funding is coming from a U.S. EPA Section 319 grant of \$483,500 through the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control. The town’s share, a 40 percent match, brings the total to \$805,994.

The proposals request noted the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control’s August 2010 decision to close a 4-mile, 900-acre stretch of May River headwaters to shellfishing due to rising fecal coliform levels that exceeded Food and Drug Administration safety guidelines for consumption. The Bluffton Oyster Co. continues to harvest from downstream beds rated unrestricted.

“A watershed action plan is needed to provide the guidance necessary to identify and implement action that can improve and protect the water quality of the May River,” the request for action-plan proposals said. “The intent ... is to protect the quality of life for greater Bluffton residents and to enable the vitality of the river and surrounding community to continue.”

The draft’s contents include an executive summary, and sections titled “Purpose and Scope,” “Background and Inventory,” “Assessment and Implementation,” “Financial Mechanisms and Administration,” and “Summary and Next Steps.” The draft ends with a set of appendices, figures and tables.

The original target was for action plan completion by the end of 2010 year, but the consultant hiring process took longer than expected.

When the consulting team was hired, town officials said a draft was to be ready by Feb. 18 for review by agencies, boards, commissions and committees. But the release date was pushed back while staff directed revisions, according to the late John Carmack, town environmental sustainability engineer.

Carmack, one of the main players working with consultants devising the action plan before he died June 28, told the May River Waterbody Management Plan Implementation Committee at its June 22 meeting he and others involved wanted to make sure it was done right.

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