

## Panel struggles with how to convince people to protect May River

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Published Wednesday, April 28, 2010

Members of Bluffton's May River oversight committee agreed Thursday that efforts to raise awareness among residents to keep the waterway clean have failed.

But they disagreed over whom to target for public education and how.

In January, a study of the river by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources found elevated levels of fecal coliform, which can be harmful to shellfish populations. At the annual May River cleanup in March, volunteers hauled away two tons of trash from the river.

Although that figure is a significant improvement from the 20 tons dredged up nine years ago, it is still far too much, according to one member of the May River Waterbody Management Plan Implementation Committee. Such a large amount of trash still being found in the river indicates the message isn't sinking in with residents, said former mayor Hank Johnston.

"I don't think that we have seen enough improvement in conditions of the river that are caused by citizens' lack of knowledge," Johnston said. "Otherwise, we wouldn't have pulled out however many tons of debris that we pulled out in the last cleanup."

He said the committee should be working closer with representatives from homeowners associations and schools to raise awareness about pollution.

Town natural resources manager Kim Jones, however, believes traditional methods of raising awareness about pollution have failed.

She said she plans to implement more scientific techniques of outreach, such as surveying residents and determining how they can be persuaded to change their behavior.

For example, she said, she would seek out people who don't clean up after their pets and determine why they don't. That would save time by targeting those who are causing problems.

"You're not going waste your time with the people who are already doing the (desired) behavior, which in traditional outreach, you would," she said.