

RiverSmart acts as a 'clearinghouse' of environmental information.

RiverSmart is an environmental clearinghouse that collaborates, educates and hopes you'll participate in the area's surrounding natural beauty.

The newly- launched website (www.riversmart.com) is a tributary of Friends of the Rivers, a nonprofit group created 10 years ago by Nancy Schilling once the building boom began in and around Bluffton and issues like stormwater runoff and high levels of fecal coliform became front- page stories.



"Nonprofits are suffering terribly and you have to find a way around that. Websites can't be static. You have to remind people to come and see you and to actively pursue people interested in the environment," she said. "We realized that unless you know specifically what you're looking for or the specific website, it's not always easy to find."

The RiverSmart site puts all that information "under a nice umbrella," Schilling said. "Come take a look at it."

RiverSmart's Director Robert C. Holquist puts it this way: "We deeplink right to what you're looking for."

So, instead of wading through the Environmental Protection Agency's website, RiverSmart might provide the information you're looking for: phytoplankton levels in the May River or other water- quality facts about Beaufort County.

Information on the site can be found under these clickable tabs: news and events; get involved; education; environment; resources; and people.

"People" means you.



Folks

interested in volunteering can visit riversmart.com to learn about opportunities and businesses or nonprofits in need of volunteers can have requests posted, according to Holquist.

There's also a community calendar of events.

RiverSmart isn't an advocacy group nor does it espouse political beliefs, but it does provide information from other sources for people looking for information about the Lowcountry, specifically the area from the Ace Basin south to the Savannah River, Holquist said.

"It's an environmental clearinghouse for the whole Lowcountry," he said. "You can go there to find out what's going on in the community, how to get involved, and learn what the best management practices are for your own home."

The "collaboration" portion of RiverSmart aims to work with individuals, organizations, grassroots groups, land trusts, scientists, government agencies and municipalities to act as a guide and connector ensuring that conservation efforts within the region are coordinated and effective, according to RiverSmart's site.

"It's meant to be used as a resource," Holquist said. "We want to hear your ideas and thoughts. Send me your pictures, your favorite eco- quote."

Visit Holquist today at the farmer's market on Calhoun Street in Old Town. He'll have a booth set up near Lawrence Street or e- mail him at robert@riversmart.net

OLD TOWN BLUFFTON CLEAN- UP

When: 9 to 11:30 a.m. May 1

Where: Bluffton Town Hall, 20 Bridge St.

Description: All you need are some sturdy shoes — the bags, gloves water and snacks will be provided.



GET SMART



To learn more about RiverSmart, visit www.riversmart.com. Notice the site's colors. Look familiar? The colors mimic the hues found in the Lowcountry's palate. Photos submitted by local photographers — most of whom are amateurs — were put through a computer program that offered up what colors would suit the interactive Web site, according to RiverSmart Director Robert C. Holquist.

"We borrowed from Mother Nature," he said.

If you're interested in checking out Mother Nature in real time, click on the "video" link on the site's homepage. You can check out the Okatie River from a camera posted on Nancy Schilling's dock overlooking the Okatie River. Schilling is the founding director of Friends of the Rivers and RiverSmart is a branch of the nonprofit. The group hopes to have a series of dock cameras around the Lowcountry, to include boat landings. Think of it as a network of "traffic-cams" for the area's waterways.

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