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Guest Column Rick Baumann: Storm water reeks havoc

11 hrs ago



Rick Baumann

I read a recent article in the Post and Courier entitled “Stormwater Flooding An Expensive Problem, Hot Issue.”

Well, it has been an “expensive” and “hot” issue for about a hundred years – and our leaders have mostly chosen to ignore that.

As development has occurred throughout our region, denuding the land, stormwater has developed accelerated paths to the lowest points.

As early as the 1940’s – when state poet laureate Archibald Rutledge published his classic book “Home by the River,” stormwater had been reeking havoc for quite some time.

“In the old days, when rice was planted here, there were no great floods. I know this because the great dikes, built two centuries ago to harness the river banks that were long entirely adequate – are now of little value. The river goes higher than it did, and it does so in a short time,” Rutledge wrote.

“Two things have caused this: the cutting of the forests, so that when rain falls, it races into the river. The other cause is that for years ditches and drainage canals have been dug, literally thousands of them, leading directly into the Santee.”

Fast forward to present times and a quote in the Post and Courier article from Eric Larson, President of the SC Association of Stormwater Managers. “The science of stormwater management is catching up with the development that has occurred.”

That is the problem. We are playing catchup – and application of the science Mr. Larson refers to is lagging far behind long established established knowledge. Why?

Conservative politicians have traditionally been against raising taxes to help pay for services that were implemented long ago. So why should they think proactively to deal with problems that are just recently understood?

The result of this brilliant mindset: we end up paying far more to fix a problem further down the road when the absolute need to address it leaves no other option.

I saw this first hand many years ago when I was appointed to our county Stormwater Advisory Committee. Our committee sought out expert advice, studied it and made recommendations - which were all summarily ignored, because the county had chosen the absolute cheapest path they could find to comply with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination Systems II (which was mandated by the Clean Water Act decades before) at the absolute deadline to do so. But the clear cutting was allowed to continue - and the impervious paving, concrete and asphalt driveways in higher density neighborhoods with steep roof pitches and no plan for residential sequestering of stormwater.

It was recently demonstrated, at a City of Charleston presentation, that an inch of rain falling on one acre of forested area would produce 750 gallons of runoff. But the same inch of rain falling on a paved one acre parking lot would produce 27,000 gallons of runoff.

Now Charleston is "working on a grant funded study" (perhaps another conservative delay) "to determine if planting more trees and creating more green space will help with stormwater issues."

Well, duh?

Are our leaders really that naive - or are we just idiots for electing them and tolerating their ineptitudes?

(Rick Baumann is the founder of Murrells Inlet Seafood and has lived and worked in the region for 50 years. He is active in causes concerning fishing, hunting, and quality-of-life in respect to the Lowcountry's outdoor heritage and issues involving the environment.)

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