CAHABA RIVER SOCIETY'S RESPONSIBLE AGENDA FOR RIVER RESTORATION AND GROWTH

The upper Cahaba watershed is our region's main drinking water source and a treasure trove of freshwater life of global importance. Growth has brought many benefits to our communities, yet the unintended impacts of development have also caused water pollution, erosion, flooding, loss of freshwater life, and threats to our drinking water supply.

The goal of the Cahaba River Society is to ***restore*** the Cahaba watershed. What does this mean? The river cannot be returned to some pristine pre-urbanized state – our communities are here, and they are growing.

A ***realistic restoration goal*** is to ***improve water quality, water supply, and habitat so that we can sustain the health of the river system, the diverse life in the river, and human uses of the river (such as for drinking water, recreation and education) for generations to come.***

The Cahaba River Society recognizes that more economic and population growth will occur in the upper Cahaba watershed. We partnered with cities, counties and many interest groups in the Upper Cahaba Watershed Study to find a better balance between growth and river restoration.

The Cahaba Study recommended practical solutions that suggest changes in the way we handle planning and development. **CRS endorses these solutions, which aim to restore the Cahaba watershed as our communities grow.**

These recommendations, summarized in the box at right, create a **responsible growth agenda** for watershed restoration. See more explanation of these policies and recommended strategies to accomplish them on the reverse and at **www.cahabariversociety.org**.

An unhealthy, endangered Cahaba River challenges our capacity to develop and sustain healthy, thriving communities everywhere in the region. If local governments, developers, and citizens will commit to innovation and apply these solutions, we can restore our river and sustain its health for future generations, even as our communities continue to grow.

RESPONSIBLE AGENDA FOR RIVER RESTORATION & GROWTH

- ***Plan land uses wisely*** to conserve areas most important to water quality and water supply.
- ***Improve design standards of new development*** to reduce unintended watershed damage.
- ***Install better storm water controls in existing developed areas*** to reduce flooding, storm water pollution, and erosion within stream channels.
- ***Encourage an equitable pattern of economic growth in the region*** – especially using urban/suburban revitalization and infill – as a complement and alternative to "greenfield" growth in sensitive areas of the Cahaba watershed and our drinking water source.

POLICIES AND SOLUTIONS FOR RIVER RESTORATION & GROWTH

♦ ***Plan land uses wisely*** to conserve areas most important to water quality and water supply.

The Upper Cahaba Watershed Study Greenprint Plan identified lands such as steep, forested slopes, aquifer recharge areas, and wetlands that are critical to the health of our water supply. Undertake land use planning and protect these lands through conservation easements, conservation development (cluster development retaining open space), less intensive development, and acquisition. The Greenprint also identifies the lands in each community least likely to cause watershed degradation when developed. Steer more intensive commercial, industrial, and higher density residential development to these lands.

♦ ***Improve design standards of new development*** to reduce unintended watershed damage.

Gain agreement on and implement standards across all communities for best practices to conserve stream buffer zones and flood plains, enable conservation subdivisions as an incentive for open space conservation, and improve storm water design to harvest rain as a resource, conserve drinking water supplies, and reduce pollution, flooding, and stream erosion. The Upper Cahaba Watershed Study (2002-05) intended to produce four model ordinances that could be adopted throughout the watershed to set wise standards for new development, yet no consensus was reached. CRS is now working collaboratively with developers, local governments, and the design and planning professionals who advise them to explore and demonstrate practical solutions.

♦ ***Install better storm water controls in existing developed areas*** to reduce impacts such as flooding, storm water pollution, and erosion.

The same impacts that are causing flooding in existing communities are also degrading the Cahaba River and its tributaries. Increased storm runoff from paving and roofs carries water pollution into the streams, and the force of the added runoff erodes the streams and collapses the banks, adding to the load of mud in the water. Retrofit improved storm water controls into existing developed areas to begin to reverse degradation of water quality and habitat. The same solutions will also reduce property damage from flooding.

♦ ***Encourage an equitable pattern of economic growth in the region*** – especially using revitalization and infill - as a complement and alternative to "greenfield" growth in sensitive areas of the Cahaba watershed and our drinking water source.

Water quality modeling for the Upper Cahaba Watershed Study showed that even if we substantially improve design standards of new development, extensive and dense build-out of the upper watershed would cause much greater river degradation. Excellent design can greatly reduce, but cannot eliminate, the watershed impacts of new development. However, there are other options for meeting regional growth needs in addition to greenspace development of all the upper Cahaba watershed's remaining open space lands – especially the headwaters that are our drinking water source. The region's overall economic health would be well served by a more balanced growth pattern throughout the metro area. Revitalization and infill of existing urban and suburban areas would bring growth back to communities that already have the infrastructure – sewer, roads and water - to handle it, reaping greater economic value for those communities at lower public cost. Investment to establish an improved public transportation system is essential to support that strategy. I-22 will draw new growth to west Jefferson County (and a need for watershed-protective standards for growth in sensitive areas of the Black Warrior watershed). A more balanced regional growth pattern will protect our drinking water, helping control costs of this essential utility, and will help bring economic benefits to a wider range of the region's people.