

BUILDING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN WASTEWATER TREATMENT THROUGH CONSTRUCTED WETLANDS

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In collaboration with the Odum School of Ecology, the University of the South, located in Sewanee, Tennessee, is undertaking a pilot constructed wastewater treatment wetland project. The primary goal of this project is to determine whether constructed wetlands are cost-effective in removing pharmaceuticals and endocrine disruptors that are incompletely and expensively treated by most conventional wastewater systems and are likely to be regulated pursuant to the federal Clean Water Act in the future. The second major goal is to build public confidence in and awareness of constructed wetlands through a comprehensive community engagement campaign. We conducted a survey in fall 2015 and focus groups in spring 2016 to understand the Sewanee community's current knowledge and perceptions of water issues as well as the means they rely on for this information. The data we collected has, among other things, helped us to develop a project website; the first public event at the wetlands was held in October 2016. Overall, we believe that this project has the potential to encourage other communities throughout the southeastern US as well as internationally to adopt constructed wetlands to treat wastewater more effectively and inexpensively.

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