

Lake James Environmental Association Organization Statement

Lake James Environmental Association (LJEA) is a non-profit, volunteer driven organization focused on the protection of the watershed of Lake James, North Carolina. Founded in 1973, LJEA has a long history of protecting the lakes, rivers, and streams flowing through Avery, Burke, and McDowell counties into Lake James. The watershed encompasses 247,000 acres, many of them forested, and is threatened by increased development, trash, erosion, and sedimentation, among other issues. Through advocacy, data collection and analysis, education, and community engagement, we are working to preserve the natural beauty and clean water of our watershed for future generations.

LJEA is built upon a foundation of:

- **Preservation** - In 1973, LJEA was formed to oppose the construction of a proposed wastewater treatment plant designed to discharge three million gallons of treated sewage daily into the Catawba River just upstream of Lake James. As a result of our successful opposition, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued an environmental impact statement, concluding there was no technical justification for this location and denying the discharge permit. The plant was relocated outside the watershed; a huge win for the water quality, flora and fauna, and human residents of the watershed and Lake James. Since 1973, LJEA has been a strong advocate for water quality and quantity issues that threaten our watershed. LJEA advocates for counties in our watershed to develop ordinances that protect our shoreline, has been active in monitoring discharge permits, zoning, and legislation, and regularly attends public hearings to speak on behalf of our watershed. LJEA was also instrumental in reducing an interbasin transfer proposal that would have severely impacted lake levels and the health of the Upper Catawba River basin.
- **Community Benefit** - LJEA believes that *all* people should be able to enjoy the healthy environment, clean water, and exceptional natural beauty of the Lake James watershed. LJEA, in collaboration with others, promoted the 3,000 acre expansion of Lake James State Park. The association is also heavily involved in combating trash issues through participation in clean-ups, advocacy, education, and partnering with state and local governments and other non-profits to foster solutions.
- **Science** - LJEA, in collaboration with the University of North Carolina - Asheville, helped fund and establish Western North Carolina's Volunteer Water Information Network (VWIN). For the last 18 years, LJEA volunteers have sampled the lake and its tributaries monthly and performed chemical, biological, erosion, and sedimentation studies throughout the watershed. In addition, LJEA supports students and faculty from regional colleges and universities to perform advanced research in the watershed. The studies inform decisions and actions and allow us to create educational materials like our State of the Watershed Report.

- **Education** - LJEAs educate the public through media awareness and public events, and cooperate with local school systems on youth education. LJEAs Kids in the Creek program annually educates 700+ students about water quality and environmental conservation. We offer in-class instruction and field trips to the Catawba River for hands-on, “feet-in” activities. In 2015, we were excited to receive the NC Governor's Volunteer Service Award for our work with Kids in the Creek. LJEAs are expanding this program to include an environmental education “tool-kit” for area teachers.
- **Collaboration** - LJEAs work closely with local government, schools, businesses, and other non-profits to ensure there is a community focus on protecting our watershed. Since 2017, LJEAs have collaborated with Appalachian State University, University of North Carolina - Asheville, Warren Wilson, and Montreat College to provide scientific assistance and guidance to our overall objectives. We also work closely with Catawba Riverkeeper Foundation, Foothills Conservancy, McDowell Trails Association, Lake James State Park, The Community of Lake James, the National Wildlife Federation, the Catawba-Wataweg Water Management Group, and others to compliment each other's programs and drive projects, grants, and activities that protect the watershed.