Atlanta’s Intrenchment Creek

The hidden headwaters of Atlanta’s Intrenchment Creek watershed flow quietly and mostly unknown underneath tangled highways, vast parking lots, the State Capitol, Panther Stadium, neighborhoods and parks – eventually defining a natural oasis, a place apart, in the heart of the city.
Where is Intrenchment Creek?

The headwaters of Intrenchment Creek are hidden beneath an urban landscape defined by asphalt, from the tangled intersection of I-75/85 and I-20 to vast parking lots surrounding the former Olympic Stadium/Turner Field. The creek flows underground in pipes and first daylighted near Boulevard Crossing Park and Chosewood Park.

Intrenchment Creek and its tributaries meander through a 9.3 square mile watershed, through Southeast Atlanta neighborhoods to DeKalb County, where it eventually flows into the South River east of Moreland Ave near I-285.

Headwaters Challenges

Urban creeks are often neglected and forgotten. Intrenchment Creek is hidden behind fence lines, under pavement and roadways. The dominance of pavement, parking lots, roads, and other hard surfaces, combined with aging and undersized stormwater and sewer pipes underground, have resulted in persistent flooding and combined sewer spills in and around the historic neighborhoods of Peoplestown, Summerhill, Mechanicsville, and Pittsburgh.

Photo: Johnathon Kelso

What is a Watershed?

A watershed is the area of land from which all rainfall drains into a body of water. A watershed is like a funnel—collecting all the water within the drainage area and channeling it into a waterway.

Atlanta’s Watersheds

The City of Atlanta’s geography is unique in that it is one of the few large cities to be located on a subcontinental divide. That means that rain that falls in the northern and western areas of the city drains into the Chattahoochee River and, eventually, the Gulf of Mexico; while rain that falls in the southern and eastern parts of the city drains into Intrenchment Creek, which joins the South River, the Altamaha River, and eventually, the Atlantic Ocean.
HISTORY OF INTRENCHMENT CREEK

1821 Decades before the Civil War, Intrenchment Creek was named on an early survey of the area, perhaps referring to trenches dug by indigenous peoples.

1864 The creek valley saw major troop movements during the Battle of Atlanta.

1911 Intrenchment Creek Viaduct constructed in Southeast Atlanta.

1936 WPA-funded infrastructure projects included the Intrenchment Creek Disposal Plant.

1956 Summerhill area targeted for urban renewal or “slum clearance.”

1964 Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium constructed and I-75/85 and I-20 built.

1980s Persistent flooding in Summerhill and Peopletown.

1996 Centennial Olympic Stadium constructed, then converted to Turner Field.

1999 South River Watershed Alliance founded in response to EPA Clean Water Act violations.

2012 Flooding and combined sewer spills in stadium neighborhoods prompted the city to launch the SE Atlanta Green Infrastructure Initiative.

2015 Turner Field sold to Georgia State University; surrounding parcels sold to GSU and a private developer.

2016 Livable Centers Initiative study proposed redevelopment concepts for the 70 acres of Turner Field parking lots.

2017 ECO-Action hosted the first Green Infrastructure Advocate Training for community leaders.

2018 Intrenchment Creek One Water Management Task Force created to address persistent flooding and secure related community benefits.

Lessons from the past

The neighborhoods surrounding GSU Panther Stadium have endured decades of infrastructure-driven injustices. Interstate highways and stadiums have transformed once-thriving communities into a vast sea of parking lots and roads—displacing residents, small businesses, and jobs and causing significant flooding and combined sewer spills into residential neighborhoods. An unprecedented opportunity exists now to repair and restore the health of the Intrenchment Creek watershed and its communities with the redevelopment of the 70 acres of stadium parking lots.

Nature in the City

Where you can find the creek, you will also find wildlife that call Intrenchment Creek home. Turtles sun themselves on logs, birds of all kinds—including the occasional heron—use the creek corridor as a flyway, beavers build lodges, fish swim, while deer and foxes make their way through the forests along the creek.

Photo: Jordan Ososki
You can help!

**EXPLORE** Intrenchment Creek and its tributaries, taking photos, tracking wildlife or taking a walk along the creek!

**SHARE** what you find with local media, social media, and citizen science apps like Smell MyCity and iNaturalist.

**CONNECT** with ECO-Action or the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network for training and support on flooding issues and green solutions.

**ORGANIZE** activities that help support the revitalization of Intrenchment Creek—a community clean up, watershed walk, or water quality monitoring event.

**ADVOCATE** for development that goes beyond compliance with environmental regulations, manages all water to address flooding and combined sewer spills, and incorporates green infrastructure with benefits for all.

**ENGAGE** with your neighbors, city council members, and NPUs to raise awareness about the creek and its potential to be a community asset.

**LEARN MORE:**
AmericanRivers.org
facebook.com/IntrenchmentCreek
instagram.com/intrenchmentcreek

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