

Pipeline

The official magazine of the Alabama Mississippi Section of the American Water Works Association

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MADISON, MISSISSIPPI

Bear Creek Water Association

At Bear Creek Water Association, “Growth” is the word of the day. Not just today, but every day. Located in the thriving south Madison County area of Mississippi with a good school system and a low crime rate, population in Bear Creek’s certificated area has continued to increase yearly.

Bear Creek Water Association is a rural water association that started in the early 1970’s with around 400 customers. That number slowly increased over a 25-year period to just over 4,000 customers in the mid 1990’s. Around that time, Bear Creek Water Association

acquired the privately owned wastewater system in the Deerfield Subdivision and started offering public sewer service to other parts of its service area. The availability of public sewer helped spur massive growth that has yet to slow. By 2006, Bear Creek Water Association had just under 10,000 water customers. By 2016 that number had grown to around 16,000 water customers representing a population of approximately 45,000 people.

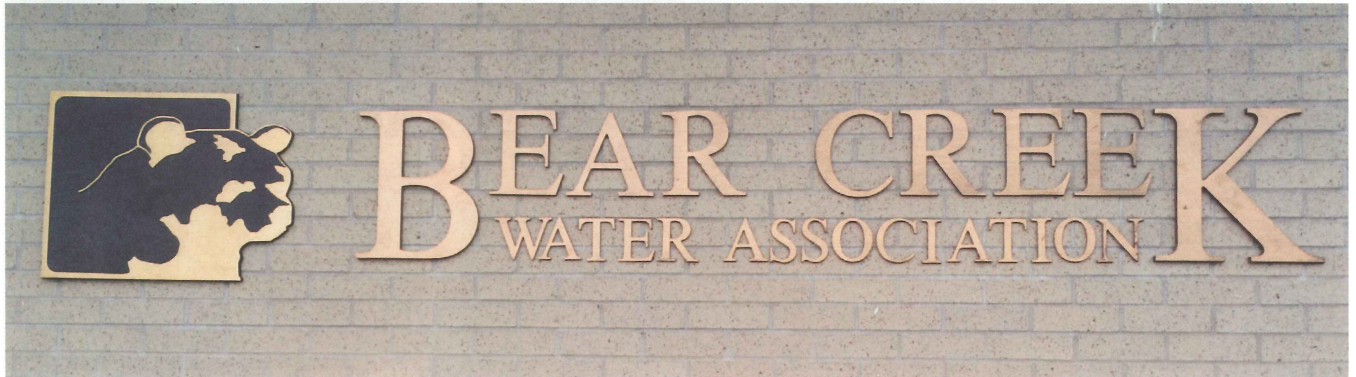
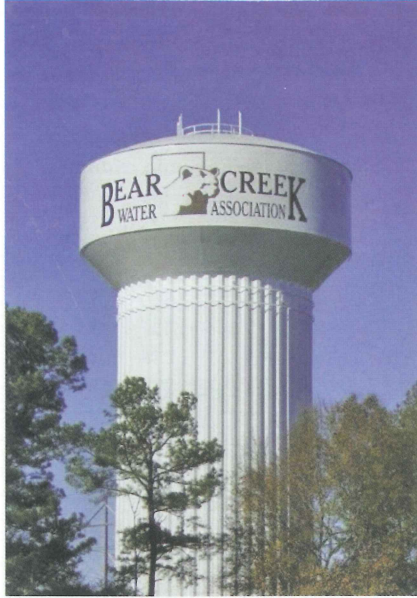
Keeping pace with the growth has been a significant challenge. New wells and tanks have been constructed, and miles of water and sewer mains have

been installed to serve the new customer base. The demands on the water system have been intense and have required careful planning and vision.

“Our Board of Directors is very knowledgeable and astute, and they strive to stay ahead of the growth,” says General Manager Nolan Williamson, “and our employees are second to none. The collective knowledge and skill among our employees makes conquering any challenge possible.”

As the growth continues, Bear Creek is in the first phase of a five-year improvement plan using Mississippi State Revolving Funds. The first year





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will involve two large water mains which will improve water pressure to certain areas, and transport water more easily to an existing elevated tank. The second year will involve more water transmission lines to improve a service area along the eastern side of the system. The third, fourth, and fifth years will involve construction of three new wells and a new elevated

tank. Projected costs will be over 10 million dollars.

While the growth thus far has been primarily residential, now Bear Creek is starting to see an increase in commercial growth. Home Depot, a few hotels, and many restaurants and schools are currently served. Several car dealerships are on the way, and more commercial growth is on the drawing board.

The water demands must be carefully planned for, not only for domestic purposes, but for fire protection also. The large majority of Bear Creek's system has line sizes large enough to support fire protection, and hydrants are in place for that very purpose.

The transition of the area from a rural undeveloped area, to a more dense urban type area didn't just

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mean that the customer base grew substantially. The company staff has grown as well. System maintenance had routinely been performed by an outside contractor. Bear Creek brought maintenance in-house several years ago. That meant the addition of employees, vehicles, and equipment. An engineering and mapping division was also added. This has caused the

number of employees to rise from less than 10 to almost 30 within the last 10 years.


“We are in a thriving area, with a membership of great people. We are excited to see what the future holds for us. We added about 700 new meters in 2015, and it appears 2016 will match that number,” says Williamson.

Bear Creek currently serves approximately 16,000 water customers and over 5,000 sewer customers within the City of Madison, City of Ridgeland, City of Canton, and unincorporated areas of Madison County. Bear Creek was named the Mississippi Water Distribution System of the Year for 2015 by the American Water Works Association. ■





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