Though the effects of climate change often seem distant, the Chattahoochee River is already feeling the heat.

For the first half of 2017, Georgia mountain streams that feed the Chattahoochee were running at historic low flows. Less rainfall in the mountains meant a low water level in Lake Lanier, and lower flows in the river downstream of Buford Dam. Late spring rains helped raise lake levels, but Lake Lanier still entered the summer season more than six feet below full pool.

Chattahoochee Basin Drought Conditions in January 2017

Sometimes it takes a drought to remind us how important the Chattahoochee River is in our day-to-day life. Each day, we draw hundreds of millions of gallons of water from the river and its lakes for drinking, landscaping, recreation, agriculture, industry, electricity production and sanitation. More than four million people use water from the Chattahoochee daily, and the river supports hundreds of plant and animal species.

The drought will end, but the demands on our river are only set to increase in pace with population growth in the region. As we plan for the growing demand on the river and future impacts of climate change in the region, it becomes more important than ever to take a big picture approach.

The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (Metro District), which includes the 15-county metro Atlanta area, recently completed a comprehensive Water Resource Management Plan that outlines strategies for regional watershed management. Climate change will be an important consideration for future planning, and the Metro District is the first of Georgia’s 11 water planning regions to explicitly include climate resiliency in its long range water supply, wastewater and watershed planning.

“With millions of people in metro Atlanta depending on the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Basin for their water supply, it is critical to consider climate resiliency in water planning,” said Danny Johnson, Manager of the District.

Rising temperatures are already becoming part of the climate resiliency challenge. Since 2014, each successive year has been ranked as the hottest on record. In the future, it will be important to prepare accordingly for the changing climate to avoid negative impacts to our communities and environment in the Chattahoochee region.

“Though the effects of climate change often seem distant, the Chattahoochee River is already feeling the heat.”

Water-Saving Checklist

Indoors:
- Wash laundry and dishes only when you have a full load
- Fix leaky faucets and ‘running’ toilets
- Install low-flow water fixtures and water-efficient toilets (free kits and rebates available from your water utility)

Outdoors:
- Avoid new plantings or use drought tolerant plants
- Mulch to retain soil moisture
- Install a rain barrel or cistern for irrigation
- Reduce outdoor watering and avoid watering during the day
- Use drip irrigation instead of sprinklers
- Avoid pressure washing

Saving Energy Saves Water Too!
- Replace old light bulbs with LED bulbs
- Install a programmable thermostat
- Update appliances to ENERGY STAR and water efficient models

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (CRK) will host Shepherd, along with acclaimed author Paul Hawken and numerous regional experts, on September 27-28 at our inaugural Climate Change Conference. We invite you to join us to learn about some of the challenges and solutions for protecting our waters in a changing climate.

The Chattahoochee River Basin is likely to experience many challenges to our water infrastructure as a result of climate change,” said J. Marshall Shepherd, Director for the Program in Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Georgia.

For more information, visit: chattahoochee.org/our-work/water-conservation-programs/
During a recent camping trip with my family, I found myself reflecting on my childhood and comparing it to how kids are growing up today.

I spent much of my young life fishing and exploring the woods. Those experiences played a significant role in making me who I am today.

When I was growing up, we did not have nearly the number of technological distractions that we have today. There was no internet, iPods or iPads. There were no smartphones, email or social media.

As I sat comfortably in my camp chair watching my six-year-old son dig for worms and my eight-year-old daughter play in the canoe resting at the water’s edge, I thought about how today’s technology and devices compete with children’s time outdoors.

I have made a commitment to double down and spend as much time outdoors with my kids as possible, and I hope all parents and grandparents will do the same. Our kids’ river and planet will benefit from our effort to create nature lovers today.
NOT SO “ROTTEN” WOOD CREEK

Neighborhood Water Watch (NWW) volunteer Greg Grantham took one whiff of Rottenwood Creek and knew something was off. Tests indicated there was a serious problem, so CRK trackers donned waders in search of the source. Real-time optical brightener tests helped to find raw sewage flowing from a broken pipe at an apartment complex into Rottenwood Creek not far from the Chattahoochee River. Spurred by media attention from WSB-TV, the apartment complex made necessary repairs to stop the spill and water quality has returned to normal levels.

TRACKING GETS TIRESOME

A massive tire dump (estimated at more than 10,000 tires!) was discovered in Proctor Creek’s Valley of the Hawks while CRK pollution trackers were investigating high bacteria levels in a nearby tributary. Trackers were able to locate and stop the bacteria source, but the titanic tire dump has yet to be removed. Tire recycling fees are largely diverted from the state fund that should pay for tire dump clean-ups. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) has been notified and we are pursuing a cleanup plan for the illegal dump.

PROPOSAL FOR ATV PARK ALONG RIVER WITHDRAWN

In early July, Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA DNR) announced that it would no longer pursue plans to build a 14-mile network of ATV trails along the Chattahoochee River at Bush Head Shoals in Heard County. CRK and dozens of concerned citizens voiced opposition to this poorly sited ATV park in written comment and at public meetings citing concerns about noise, trespassing, safety, wildlife protection and erosion. The individual who sold the 700-acre property to a conservation group, which then deeded it to the state, wrote in opposition to the plan that, “I cannot imagine a use more inconsistent with my intent...”

CITY DENIES LANDFILL PROPOSAL

CRK successfully opposed a proposal from a private landowner to create an inert landfill adjacent to Big Creek—at a site approximately half of a mile from Lake Lanier and 7,500 feet upstream of Buford’s municipal drinking water intake. Buford’s Board of Commission acknowledged residents’ and CRK’s concerns and denied the proposal.

RED ALERT: SEWER SPILL FOUND DURING A RIVER PATROL

During a May river patrol, CRK discovered foul, bright red water pouring into the Chattahoochee River in south Fulton County. We tracked the spill up to a broken sewer line, which was caused by erosion and a fallen tree. Fulton County crews fixed the broken line the next day and reported that the bright red liquid was soft drink syrup from a local beverage manufacturing company with a permit to send excess syrup to the wastewater treatment facility. Fulton County estimates that more than 17,000 gallons of raw sewage mixed with soft drink syrup spilled into the river before the pipe was repaired.
**THE FISH HAWK - IN DANGER AGAIN?**

Though the Osprey is the second most widely distributed raptor in the world, its life along shores puts it at risk—again.

Ospreys, like many birds of prey, were brought to the brink of extinction due to exposure to DDT, a farming pesticide used in the early-to-mid-20th century. Before DDT was banned in 1972, the United States’ Osprey population was rapidly declining.

Today, populations have returned and new generations are thriving, but this upward trend may be threatened in the coming years due to habitat loss along our nation’s waterways. Change in climate and rising sea levels threaten these migratory hawks, as 79 percent of their summer migratory range could be underwater by the year 2080. Since their diet consists only of fish, inundated shorelines means more Ospreys will have to compete over less prime habitat.

Sightings of the charismatic bird are always a treat—just ask West Point Lake Floating Classroom (WPLFC) students that get an up close and personal look at these birds in their natural habitat.

“One of the most rewarding parts of our floating classroom programs is watching students as they spot Ospreys through binoculars with excited exclamations. These sightings are a definite highlight for us.”

- Laura Breyfogle, CRK’s WPLFC Naturalist

West Point Lake is a great place to see these magnificent birds, partly because of small bald cypress trees that inhabit the shallows. It is rumored that these trees, which are not native to the Chattahoochee River basin, were planted in the late-1960s by ranger John Anderson to warn boaters of shallow water. The trees stand approximately 8 to 10 feet tall and are completely isolated from shore, making great nesting sites for Ospreys.

So the next time you’re on the water, look around and make sure to catch a glimpse of this impressive bird.

**RECORD-BREAKING 733 VOLUNTEERS ‘SWEEP THE HOOCH’**

A record-breaking 733 volunteers dug into the nooks and crannies of more than 40 sites in and around the Chattahoochee River for CRK’s annual Sweep the Hooch clean-up event. Thanks to the hundreds of volunteers, we removed 16.7 tons of trash!

CRK organized the multi-site cleanup in partnership with the National Park Service and the Upper Chattahoochee Chapter of Trout Unlimited. Volunteers served in three different capacities at the cleanup: paddlers picking up trash from the water, waders cleaning the river banks and walkers canvassing the grounds adjacent to our river and streams. These volunteers spread out across 43 sites and spent half the day pulling trash and debris from the river. “Participating in an event like Sweep the Hooch is a fun way to explore different sections of the river,” said Jerry Duncan, who volunteered at the Jones Bridge site in Fulton County.

The record-breaking 733 volunteers were a 25 percent increase from the previous year, despite high water levels and unseasonably cool temperatures after heavy rains earlier in the week.

“We sincerely appreciate the efforts of all the volunteers and sponsors to clean trash and debris from more than 100 river miles along the Chattahoochee,” said Jason Ulseth, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper. “We are thrilled we were able to set a new volunteer record in 2017 and look forward to another big year in 2018!”

CRK’s and our partners’ efforts through Sweep the Hooch have removed more than 58 tons of trash and debris with the help of nearly 4,000 volunteers since it began in 2011.

**THANK YOU TO OUR 2017 EVENT SPONSORS:**

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- Family 2 Family
- The Home Depot

**RIVER ADVOCATE:**
- Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation/Brown Bag Marketing
- Patagonia
- WEG Electric Corp.

**RIVER CONSERVATOR:**
- David B. and Gail Chester

For more information, visit: chattahoochee.org/our-work/enforcing-environmental-laws
THANK YOU TO ALL OUR MEMBERS AND DONORS
FOR HELPING US KEEP WATCH OVER OUR WATERS!

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The Outside World
Tom Wilson

Please become a member today. Join the thousands of people who are already helping us keep watch over our water by donating at www.chattahoochee.org.
For many years, CRK dreamed of reaching more disadvantaged and underserved youth from Atlanta Public Schools (APS) with our on-the-water environmental education experience—a trip on the Lake Lanier Aquatic Learning Center, or “floating classroom.” Last year, that dream was made a reality.

Since the scholarship program for the floating classroom began in 2008, CRK had been unable to reach these students directly because of an unwritten rule that prohibited APS students from participating in on-the-water field trips.

“We wanted these children to have the experience, too; so we reached them through after-school programs like the Boys and Girls Club,” said Becca Klein, CRK Development Director. “But we knew we were still missing many children who should also get this opportunity.”

Well, as they say—where there’s a will, there’s a way; CRK was determined to find the way.

Over the course of the past year, CRK worked diligently with the APS Superintendent’s Office and their legal department to find a way to make the field trips possible. Finally, last fall an agreement was reached and CRK was given the green light to start working directly with Title One middle schools.

In year one of the program, students from Long Middle School, Coretta Scott King Young Women’s Leadership Academy, Young Middle School and others were able to participate in the program, which teaches youth about the connection between the river that supplies their drinking water and their day-to-day lives.

“This opportunity has provided our students with experiences that enhance the instruction that they receive in the classroom with real-world applications that support our focus to produce environmental stewards,” said Rabieh J. Hafza, the 6-12 grade Science Coordinator for APS. “Additionally, this opportunity provides students with the experiences that they would not receive without this program and partnership.”

Each year, CRK brings more than 2,000 students on board the Lake Lanier floating classroom free of charge through scholarships.

For more information, visit: chattahoochee.org/our-work/education-training/

“PROTECTING THE RIVER RUNS IN THE FAMILY”

“The river has always been a part of our lives,” said Mary Anne Lanier.

From growing up in LaGrange and raising a family in Atlanta, Lanier has many memories of life along the Chattahoochee. As a young child she helped rescue her grandmother from her home when it was threatened by rising creek waters after heavy rains near West Point Lake. Later, she slalom skied on West Point Lake with her then-boyfriend and now-husband of 37 years, Jamie Lanier. They met in the headwaters of the Chattahoochee.

And yes, Jamie is related to Sidney Lanier, Lake Lanier’s namesake and author of the poem “The Song on the Chattahoochee.”

The daughter of Ray Anderson—Founder and Chairman of Interface Inc. and known as the world’s greenest CEO—Lanier is carrying on her father’s legacy as a trustee of the Ray C. Anderson Foundation. Two years ago, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper Jason Ulseth invited Lanier and her family on board the CRK patrol boat to tour the river below Peachtree Creek, where nearly a dozen wastewater facilities and power plants discharge into the river. On the boat, she rediscovered her love of the river. “The river is incredibly important to protect because it serves the basic needs of millions of people,” said Lanier.

“It’s a privilege to protect the river, just like my Dad did.”

- Mary Anne Lanier

Lanier joined the CRK Board of Directors and rolled up her sleeves as Chair of the upcoming 2017 Climate Change Conference. The conference will explore solutions for resiliency, and will feature Paul Hawken, Executive Director of Project Drawdown. “Project Drawdown is not just a book, it’s an ongoing project with a roadmap of practical solutions that if scaled would reduce carbon levels in our atmosphere and lead to a resilient future,” said Lanier.
The Water Control Manual outlines how the Corps manages its federal reservoir projects within the ACF Basin, which include Metro Atlanta’s primary water supply reservoir at Lake Lanier and Buford Dam.

The update is an effort to balance operations of the dams between the Corps’ federally authorized purposes and the ever-growing demands for water from the basin. Chattahoochee Riverkeeper closely scrutinized the effort to update the Manual, which was informally updated in the late 1980s, but had not undergone formal revisions since the 1950s.

In January 2016, we submitted lengthy comments on the draft manual. The final version was released in December 2016—with substantive changes that addressed some of our concerns—and formally approved in March.

The update to the manual has not come without controversy. At least two lawsuits—one by the State of Alabama and one from three nonprofits led by Apalachicola Riverkeeper—were filed challenging the validity of the updated manual.

A major concern is with the Corps granting the State of Georgia’s request for an increase in water withdrawals of 216 million gallons per day for a new total of 621 million gallons per day from Lake Lanier and the Chattahoochee downstream of Buford Dam.

The new operations reduce the minimum required flow in the river downstream of Buford Dam during winter months to hold more water back in Lake Lanier. Nevertheless, this new seasonal flow regime is unlikely to increase storage in the lake due to the increased water withdrawals.

Allowing more water to be withdrawn to supply Metro Atlanta will mean less water for communities in Middle and South Georgia, as well as Florida. We are also concerned that lower flows in the Chattahoochee through Atlanta will make it harder for the river to dilute wastewater discharges from urban treatment plants, which could harm water quality in downstream communities.

CRK will continue monitoring the lake and river to gauge how the new operations impact the health of our river system and advocating for increased conservation and efficiency to ensure we have enough clean water now and for future generations.

For more information, visit: chattahoochee.org/our-work/tri-state-water-conflict/
CRK’S INTERNATIONAL INTERN TEAM:
THINKING GLOBALLY, ACTING LOCALLY

Bringing a world of perspective, our international intern team is working locally to improve our waters. Duoduo Lin and Ola Sunmonu have made a huge impact in less than a year, inspiring all of us to take part where and when we can.

Duoduo joins CRK from China. She recently completed a Master’s Degree of Science in Environmental Engineering at Georgia Tech. Despite the grueling school work, Duoduo wanted to make a local impact while here in Atlanta, and found a home at CRK after taking a graduate-level water quality class taught by our founding director and riverkeeper Sally Bethea.

Ola hails from Nigeria and has just received his Master’s Degree in Public Health, with a special focus on Environmental Health, from Georgia State University. Ola believes deeply in the Neighborhood Water Watch (NWW) program, and became a volunteer when he moved to Atlanta. Shortly after bringing in his first water sample, Ola deepened his engagement with CRK by applying to become an intern.

Both interns have been a big help to the NWW program. Each apply their vast technical skills in the lab and are equally quick to throw on a pair of waders and take to the field to collect water samples and track sources of pollution.

These interns work hard and stay late. They put on waders in the dead of winter and the high heat of summer, always with a smile on their face and an eagerness to do meaningful work. Their efforts have led to cleaner waters and healthier communities.

“The NWW program is crucial in protecting the health of community members that rely on these waterways for livelihood or recreation.”

- Ola Sunmou

Duoduo Lin and Ola Sunmonu training NWW volunteers

ORVIS PARTNERS TO MONITOR E. COLI LEVELS IN THE HOOCH

Contamination from fecal bacteria has the potential to make people sick. It’s also a major concern to the outdoor water recreation community. That’s why the 2017 Orvis Quality Hooch Program is raising funds to support the BacteriALERT project.

BacteriALERT is a partnership between CRK, the National Park Service and the United States Geological Survey to monitor bacteria levels within the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area (CRNRA), which receives approximately three million visitors annually.

In 2015, Orvis approached CRK with the desire to start a cause marketing campaign (similar to the Save the Hooch campaign started by SweetWater Brewing Company) to raise money to support CRK’s water monitoring efforts. Through in-store fundraisers, the sale of Quality Hooch hats and tees, a fishing tournament and film festival the campaign raised $10,000!

The CRNRA encompasses 48 miles of the Chattahoochee River from Lake Sidney Lanier’s Buford Dam to Atlanta; this section runs through the highly urbanized greater metro Atlanta region and is home to a world class trout fishery. Many CRNRA visitors participate in water-based recreational activities, including fishing. Most of the time water quality is safe. However, the CRNRA is subject to significant pollution sources, including E. coli contamination from polluted stormwater and other sources.

“Supporting the BacteriALERT project through this year’s Quality Hooch Program made perfect sense for us,” said Paul Range, the retail district manager for Orvis.

“The real time data will benefit the many anglers that already enjoy the river and also better educate those that have been reluctant to participate in the past due to feared contamination.”

- Paul Range, Retail District Manager, Orvis

The BacteriALERT program is popular with Atlanta’s growing outdoor recreation community because it is the only system that provides real-time information about health risks from contact with the water in the river park. Through a system of remote water quality sensors and laboratory analyzed samples, BacteriALERT issues public advisories when E. coli levels exceed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommended values.

For more information, visit: chattahoochee.org/quality-hooch
Industrial Polluters Held Accountable

Polluted runoff from industrial sites poses a threat to water quality throughout the Chattahoochee River watershed. Through our Protecting Streams and Communities from Industrial Pollution (PSCIP) program, we use comprehensive mapping, review of state records and field investigations to find and stop industrial sites from discharging polluted runoff into our waterways when it rains. As part of our PSCIP program, CRK first takes proactive strategy to work with industrial site owners to bring them into compliance.

Unfortunately, not all site owners want to take proactive measures. That’s when we rely on the citizen suit provision of the Clean Water Act, which allows member organizations to enforce the laws when the government is unwilling or unable to do so.

In 2016, CRK discovered an 11-acre property in Douglas County that had towering piles of aggregate material and gravel often used in road paving projects stored on the banks of Sweetwater Creek.

During heavy rains, we observed dirty water flowing from the site into the creek. The materials running off the site and into the creek threaten the aquatic life that calls the stream home. The pollution could also endanger Georgians that use and enjoy the creek, as the site is located five miles upstream of the popular Sweetwater Creek State Park.

CRK’s investigation revealed that the site was leased to a company that grinds aggregate material for paving projects, but lacked permits and appropriate measures to stop the flow of polluted rain water from running off site.

In this case, the owners resisted our attempts to proactively resolve these issues. After two months of phone calls and delayed responses, we brought in Andy Thompson, Partner at Smith, Gambrell and Russell, LLP, to represent us in the case.

In January, we sent the property owners a formal notice of intent to sue pursuant to the Clean Water Act. This action prompted a response from the owners, who brought in a consultant and developed plans to install best management practices (BMPs) to control stormwater runoff as well as remove the aggregate materials.

We will continue to monitor this and hundreds of other industrial sites to keep pollution out of the Chattahoochee.

Gainesville Poultry Plant Captures Pollution

Flat Creek originates in midtown Gainesville and flows six miles through city neighborhoods, passing schools and churches before entering into Lake Lanier. Sadly, it’s one of the state’s most impaired waterways due to extremely high concentrations of E. coli (bacteria) and other harmful pathogens.

In 2012, CRK began a long-term monitoring program to assess the degree of the creek’s impairment. During rain events, we found bacteria levels in Flat Creek were more than 1,000 times the level recommended by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Bacteria levels in stormwater runoff from poultry processing plants were found to be a significant contributor to the impairment.

When attempts to work proactively with poultry processing companies were unsuccessful, CRK turned to the power of the media and the authority of local, state and federal agencies. Ultimately, the EPA took enforcement action against two of the largest chicken processing plants in Gainesville. In 2016, Pilgrim’s Pride Corporation was issued a $65,850 fine by the EPA as a result of violations to the federal Clean Water Act.

In 2016, Pilgrim’s Pride invested more than $500,000 to upgrade its stormwater infrastructure, including installing a 70,000-gallon storage tank and pump station, which captures the critical first flush of a rain event from the facility and store the water until it can be pre-treated onsite before being sent to the city’s sewage treatment plant.

“We are committed to being better stewards of Gainesville’s aquatic resources and look forward to working with Chattahoochee Riverkeeper in the future.”

-Tony Pyle, Complex Environmental Manager, Pilgrim’s Pride

This enforcement action mandated that the company implement a suite of corrective actions to control its stormwater discharges. To address its stormwater, Pilgrim’s Pride hired a full-time Complex Environmental Manager, who conducted a comprehensive site assessment of the company’s stormwater system.

In June, CRK and the property owners finalized a consent decree that settled the case, setting clear terms for the remediation of the site and establishing a plan for long-term protections to ensure the adjacent waters are not polluted by stormwater runoff.

For more information, visit: chattahoochee.org/our-work/enforcing-environmental-laws/polluted-stormwater-control
More than 300 paddlers raced down the Chattahoochee on May 20 for the 15th annual Back to the Chattahoochee River Race and Festival, organized by CRK in partnership with the National Park Service and City of Roswell.

The paddle party launched from Garrard Landing Park in Roswell with 331 paddlers in 255 boats racing nearly eight miles downstream to Riverside Park where winners received awards in more than two dozen categories and enjoyed SweetWater brews.

After the race, festival-goers from all over Metro Atlanta joined the paddlers to enjoy live music from Rock U Kids and Dead 27s, plus an array of artisan and environmentally-focused exhibitors. Proceeds from the event will help CRK achieve its mission of a drinkable, swimmable and fishable river.

Many thanks to the 110 paddlers who took part in the Chattahoochee Valley River Revival on May 6! We had a great time on and off the water, as the paddle gave way to a festive evening at the Downtown River Park in West Point, Georgia.

Along with the good food, fun activities provided by our partners and music that had people dancing, the event also provided us with a great opportunity to raise awareness of the river. We also highlighted the importance of water stewardship and CRK’s outreach programs, such as the West Point Lake Floating Classroom and NWW program.

Our third annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival held in Gainesville was an inspiring event. The festival is a natural extension of CRK’s work to engage and encourage people to act on behalf of the environment.

Along with presenting 15 motivational films, we hosted ten nonprofit partners at the Environmental Expo. Guests enjoyed SweetWater beer and won coveted raffle and spinning wheel prizes!

New this year was a Children’s Film Festival and interactive fair to inspire young minds. Together we raised $11,000 to support the Headwaters’ NWW program.