

RiverCHAT

CHATTAHOOCHEE
RIVERKEEPER®

Spring 2014
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Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (CRK)
www.chattahoochee.org

Let the river celebration begin!

We're taking a trip down memory lane this year, as Chattahoochee Riverkeeper turns 20.

In the coming months, we will recall the victories, the challenges and most importantly the stories about the people who have helped us along the way.

Celebrate this milestone with us at events planned to inspire our river family and friends — from Sweep the Hooch in April and River Revival in May, to the River Race and Festival in June and our Anniversary Gala in October. See www.chattahoochee.org for details.

At the beginning

The riverkeeper concept seems obvious today, like many things in hindsight. But, when **John Cronin** became the Hudson Riverkeeper in 1983, he started a brand-new model of environmental advocacy — one empowered by the enforcement of clean water laws, a focus on ecological health and a network of informed and passionate citizens.

Waterkeepers around the world — now more than 200 — protect their local waterways by confronting pollution and other threats in the courts, the media and the political system. See www.waterkeeper.org.

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (formerly known as Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper) officially began its river duties in March 1994 when Sally Bethea was hired as the organization's founding director and riverkeeper. A grant from the **Turner Foundation** made this possible.

CRK's birth was preceded by nearly a year

of meetings with paddlers, fisherman, scientists, water experts and environmental advocates to develop a strategic plan and geographic focus for the organization. Without a doubt, the prime motivating force behind the new organization was its co-founders — **Rutherford and Laura Turner Seydel**.

Biggest challenge

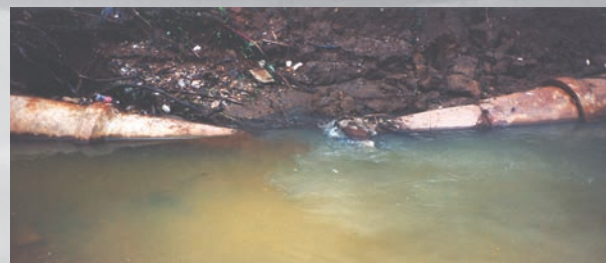
Before we could tackle other threats to the Chattahoochee, which supplies drinking water for nearly four million Georgians, we knew that we had to force the river's biggest polluter to comply with the federal Clean Water Act. Cleaning up neighborhoods and restoring downstream communities was paramount.

For decades, the city of Atlanta had allowed raw sewage to enter the river and tributaries from its failing sewer system, which had not been maintained properly since the 1970s.

It is easy to forget that 20 years ago city streams regularly were filled with toilet paper, condoms and even fecal matter after the smallest storm and sometimes during dry weather. Peachtree Creek, Proctor Creek, Tanyard Creek, Nancy Creek, Utoy Creek and dozens more were among those affected.

Today, these streams and the Chattahoochee River downstream of Atlanta are dramatically cleaner, thanks largely to the waterkeeper model of environmental advocacy and a group of citizens who demanded clean water for everyone.

Let's celebrate this victory and so many more as CRK turns 20!



In the beginning: Sally Bethea, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper's founding executive director; and co-founders J. Rutherford Seydel and Laura Turner Seydel.

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Our mission is to advocate and secure the protection and stewardship of the Chattahoochee River, its tributaries and watershed.

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Reflections

Twenty years ago, few paddlers would have considered taking a weekend trip down the Chattahoochee River immediately below Atlanta. It was simply too polluted.

Chronic spills of raw sewage from the city's long-neglected sewer system made the river unsafe for public recreation much of the time — and it was nearly impossible to find public access points to launch a boat.

Off-limits by design

As the first riverkeeper for the Chattahoochee, beginning my post in 1994, I learned that the lack of access to the river below the confluence of Peachtree Creek in Atlanta was by design.

Rather than take action to clean up the Chattahoochee using its regulatory authority, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) decided to keep the river off-limits with no new boat ramps or parks. The 65-mile stretch of river from Atlanta to West Point Lake — flowing downstream through South Fulton, Cobb, Douglas, Coweta and Heard counties — was kept largely invisible to the general public.

Thanks to a successful legal strategy led by Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, the water in this section is dramatically cleaner today.

Even as boaters and fishermen are finding a 'new' river to enjoy downstream of Atlanta, massive trash flotillas and plastic caught in riverbank vegetation spoil an otherwise scenic vista.



Now, it is time to tackle the detritus that has washed into the Chattahoochee from our urban environment.

Polishing a hidden gem

Last November, CRK organized a two-day paddle and cleanup trip on the 13-mile river section from Georgia Power's Plant McDonough to Campbellton Road (Highway 166) in South Fulton County.

We started in a light rain, but the skies soon cleared

and our group enjoyed a glorious weekend of paddling and camping on Buzzard Roost Island with permission of its owner Fulton County. Because of the island's archeological significance as part of an Indian trading route and the boundary between the Creeks and Cherokees, the county allows very limited public access.

With trash baskets on our kayaks and several canoes to hold most of the debris, we worked our way downstream, pulling everything imaginable from the riverbank, including a water-soaked artificial putting green. The work was exhausting and extremely rewarding; our group of 12 paddlers pulled nearly two tons of trash out of the river with the help of volunteer **Matt Robinson** and his motorboat.

By the time you read this newsletter, we will have returned to Buzzard Roost in early March, this time focusing on tire removal. Join us at one of our cleanups in 2014. See www.chattahoochee.org for dates and to register.

Sally Bethea
Executive Director and Riverkeeper

Watershed Moment

Not long ago, in the Johnson Ferry Unit of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, I encountered two wide-eyed children pulling their parents along in search of the beaver pond. I directed them to the largest one and also showed them where I'd seen a beaver swimming in the river the week before. This reminded me of how easy it is to view wildlife in our river park. Without really trying, I seasonally see beaver, muskrat, deer, fox, coyotes, possums, raccoons, cormorants, kingfishers, sandhill cranes, an occasional bald eagle, and various species of ducks, hawks and owls. There are noisy great blue heron rookeries and even noisier chorus frog serenades. Last spring, I watched a box turtle lay her eggs in a place where her hatchlings could live their life without encountering cars or lawnmowers. We are truly blessed to have such a rich slice of nature in Atlanta's backyard. — **Alan Toney**, Sandy Springs



Red-eared Slider, Island Ford

Photo courtesy of Tom Wilson

What's your "Watershed Moment"? Email your hi-res color image of the river, and about 100 words about its inspiration, to jwoodson@chattahoochee.org.

On Patrol

For further details on CRK's investigations and enforcement actions, go to www.chattahoochee.org/on-patrol.

PROTECTING STREAMS, COMMUNITIES

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper has been hard at work this past year, protecting streams and communities from industrial stormwater pollution, and we have good news to report.

To date, we have helped 25 industries comply with clean water regulations that require the use of best management practices to keep contaminants from flowing off their sites and into nearby waterways when it rains. Because 2013 was one of the wettest years in Georgia's history, our timing to initiate this new CRK program could not have been better.

100 industries in four years

Our goal is to help at least 100 industrial facilities come into compliance with Georgia's Industrial Stormwater General Permit by the end of 2016. We are conducting a comprehensive investigation throughout the Chattahoochee watershed to identify those industries that are failing to meet clean water laws and are working with them to stop polluted runoff.

One success story involves **Valiant Steel and Equipment, Inc.**, which processes primary metals and is located in Gwinnett County's Crooked Creek watershed. As a result of our intervention, the company installed pollution control measures to prevent zinc, arsenic, and other heavy metals from flowing downstream into the river.

At **Standard Concrete Products** in Atlanta's Proctor Creek watershed, new pollution controls focus on preventing various contaminants from flowing off-site. New management practices at **Williamson Auto Parts**, an auto salvage yard located on the banks of Yellow Jacket Creek in Troup County, will keep automotive fluids and lead from flowing off site, as well.

With each new facility coming into compliance, we can all enjoy the rewards of a cleaner, safer water supply.



Rainy year washes nutrients into Lake Lanier

During the 2013 growing season (April-October), CRK collected monthly water samples at 10 locations on Lake Lanier and tested them for chlorophyll a as part of our **Lake Lanier Clean Water Campaign**. Chlorophyll a levels are used to determine the amount of algal growth in the lake and are an important indicator of lake health. Our results were much higher than the previous year due to greater rainfall and stormwater runoff into the lake. We observed chlorophyll a levels higher than the state water quality standard at two locations. This confirmed the need for an expedited cleanup plan. CRK will continue Lake Lanier testing in 2014. Additionally, we are pleased to announce that a similar monitoring program will be conducted on West Point Lake.

HELEN

Lake Lanier

Illegal sewer connections in Proctor Creek

Data collected in recent years through CRK's **Neighborhood Water Watch Program** revealed very high *E. coli* levels in the main stem of Proctor Creek near Troy Street in northwest Atlanta. We shared our data with officials in the city's Department of Watershed Management, which began working to identify potential sources using closed-caption television tests, dye tests and visual inspections. Over the past six months, the city's efforts have located 27 illegal sewer connections — pipes that were thought to be flowing to a sewage treatment plant as part of a former sewer separation project, but were instead sending untreated waste directly into Proctor Creek via storm drains. As of January, seven of these sewer lines had been disconnected, and our samples already show improved water quality in the creek.

ATLANTA

Chattahoochee River

West Point Lake

LAGRANGE

Bacteria monitoring at Whitesburg, Franklin

Thanks to a grant from the **Alice Huffard Richards Foundation**, CRK is able to measure bacteria levels weekly at two locations in the Chattahoochee downstream of Atlanta: Whitesburg in Carroll County and Franklin in Heard County. As public access areas and parks continue to be added along the river in this region between Atlanta and West Point Lake, the Chattahoochee's condition is of increasing interest to boaters, paddlers and fishermen. Although much is known about bacteria levels in the river in metro Atlanta, less information is available in this downstream region. The data, to be collected for one year and made available to the public, will be used to help guide recreational use of the river.

Lake George

Chicken Processor Pollutes Fort Creek

Several months after **JCG Foods**, a chicken processor in Pine Mountain Valley, announced the expansion of two new processing lines, the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) reissued its wastewater discharge permit with no limit on volume of effluent or phosphorous load. JCG Foods discharges into Fort Creek, a small stream that eventually flows into Goat Rock Lake on the Chattahoochee River. Chicken processors contribute large quantities of phosphorous to wastewater. Without adequate treatment, phosphorous pollutes the receiving water body and increases the chance of algal blooms and fish kills. JCG Foods has been discharging phosphorous at 50 to 200 times the concentration of a modern wastewater treatment facility. We have brought this issue to EPD's attention and will continue to monitor the facility and any downstream impacts.

River Stewardship

JAMIE PRYOR KNOWS THE WORTH OF WATER

Growing up the son of missionaries in Iran, CRK board member **Jamie Pryor** knows first-hand the worth of clean water and what happens when people do not have access to it. In fact, he once caught cholera and spent three weeks curled up in the back of the family van on a trip through Turkey.

Pryor's time in Iran left a lasting impression on him. He saw canals simultaneously used for flood control, cooking, bathing, and drinking water — a recipe for cholera and other water-borne diseases. As an Eagle Scout and summer camp canoe instructor, his appreciation for clean water only grew.

Nineteen years old and fluent in Farsi, Pryor was called



Jamie Pryor has a keen interest in international affairs and clean water.

back to Tehran by the United States Embassy to work as an interpreter during the height of the Iranian Revolution. Although Pryor and his family eventually left Iran, Pryor has remained interested in international affairs and clean water initiatives.

After completing an undergraduate degree in economics (Franklin & Marshall College) and a master's degree in international economics (University of Kentucky), Pryor made his home in Atlanta. He is now senior vice-president of corporate finance for PNC Bank.

Pryor helps clean up Peachtree Creek

CRK first met Pryor in the late 1990s, when he led a coalition of Memorial Park neighborhoods in a fight to fix a broken pipe that was dumping sewage into Peachtree Creek. Pryor asked for CRK's help to identify the officials responsible for fixing the problem. We gave him the help he needed, and today Peachtree Creek is a lot cleaner because of our joint efforts.

In 2007, Pryor helped launch **Royal Bank of Canada's Blue Water Project**, which funded CRK's 2011 report, "Filling the Water Gap: Conservation Successes and Missed Opportunities in Metro Atlanta" (see <http://www.chattahoochee.org/filling-the-water-gap-report.php>). In 2009, Pryor joined CRK's board of directors.

When asked his thoughts on the most pressing issue facing the Chattahoochee River, Pryor looks to the future: "Water is always going to be a limited resource, and we need to protect it for human health and future economic development."

MIDDLE CHATTAHOOCHEE STUDENTS GET WATER LESSONS

Communities in the Middle Chattahoochee region — from Franklin, Hogansville and LaGrange to Lanett, Pine Mountain and West Point — are the focus of CRK's expanding water stewardship and education programs.

Our regional outreach coordinator Henry Jacobs, based in LaGrange, is actively working in local schools to present educational programs that give students an opportunity to conduct water monitoring, learn about their watershed and discuss water conservation.

Field studies engage students

Last November, a group of 12th-grade students from **LaGrange Academy** tested the water in Troup County's Long Cane Creek. The previous week, the students participated in a two-hour classroom session to learn about watersheds and the importance of water monitoring. Once in the field, they used methods approved by Georgia Adopt-A-Stream to gather data on the biological, physical and chemical state of the stream.

Mickey McCoy, environmental science teacher at LaGrange Academy, was pleased: "This unique experience was shared with excitement to



Boots Martin learns about macro-invertebrates in a local stream.

other students and parents and as a result led to benefits beyond the classroom door."

Programs with **Hillside Montessori** and **Rosemont Elementary School** have been equally successful, as younger age groups were given the opportunity to experience their watershed firsthand.

Ashley Strickland, a third grade teacher at Rosemont Elementary was surprised to find that many of her students did not know their drinking water came from the Chattahoochee River. After our presentations, her students understood the definition of a watershed and were excited to learn more about water in their science classes.

Boots Martin (pictured), a student at Hillside Montessori School, was just as

excited when it came to learning about the bullfrogs and crayfish he discovered on a field trip and how they contribute to the health of a stream ecosystem.

Inspired by this spirit to learn more about the environment around us, CRK will continue to serve as a resource for students and teachers throughout the Chattahoochee River Basin.

GREENHOUSE FOUNDATION: A FAMILY LEGACY

The GreenHouse Foundation isn't just any nonprofit organization — it's a family legacy.

Started in 2012 by siblings **Shedonna Alexander** and **CeeLo Green**, the foundation is a continuation of a philanthropic ideal within their family. "We wanted to continue the legacy that our grandmother and mother laid out for us," Shedonna said.

Their grandmother, Ruby Callaway Robinson, was executive director of CASCADE, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to addressing drug use and abuse among the nation's youth. Shedonna also spoke fondly of her mother, who was one of the first female firefighters in Atlanta.

From an early age, these strong role models taught the siblings about the importance of giving back to their community. It is a lesson that laid the groundwork for their current endeavors.

"We saw that environmental education wasn't in the neighborhood we grew up in," Shedonna said. "We wanted to change that."



Shedonna Alexander and CeeLo Green started the GreenHouse Foundation in 2012.

"Many of them don't even know what a seed is. They have never been outside in that way before."

As far as the future plans of the GreenHouse Foundation go, organizers are currently focusing on the neighborhood cluster of five schools. Honored by GreenHouse Foundation with an "Environmental Stewardship" award, CRK is excited to be a part of these efforts, as well.

"We would love to see them be environmental superstars," Shedonna said. "We want to give these students every resource possible to move forward with this knowledge however they see fit — whether bringing recycling into their homes, starting community gardens, or teaching their parents the importance of water conservation. The opportunities are endless."

And, change they have.

Each week, Shedonna is out at one of five schools working directly with students. In two years, they have reached 500 underserved students with environmental education. "We take these babies from the ground up," she said with a smile.

AVEDA REMAINS VITAL CLEAN WATER PARTNER

For the third consecutive year, **Aveda** chose CRK as its Earth Month partner for the state of Georgia. The partnership has raised more than \$100,000 to help protect the Chattahoochee River.

Sally Bethea, CRK's executive director, recounts how the partnership began.

"The partnership actually started locally in 2010," she said. "We were contacted by Atlanta's **Van Michael Salons** who wanted to do a fundraiser to raise awareness about the importance of our local water resources.

"They wanted to make the connection between the resource that was so important to their day-to-day work, and the mission that CRK was carrying out in the community."

In the first two years, Van Michael raised \$15,000.



In 2012, Aveda's corporate office decided to shift its fundraising priorities and focus on local water initiatives. A press release from that year states the company "wanted to bring the issues close to home for our employees and customers."

Today there are more than 40 salons in metro Atlanta spreading CRK's message. Activities have included: special in-house salon specials, social media fundraising drives, an Earth Day cut-a-thon, and more.

CRK is honored to be a part of the 2014 campaign, which urges customers to "Protect Water, Change Lives." It is a message that definitely hits close to home, as the organization celebrates 20 years of doing just that.

Stay tuned to www.chattahoochee.org for details on Aveda Earth Month events in your neighborhood!

River Matters

For information on these and other river-related events, visit www.chattahoochee.org/calendar.

March 15

Water Drop Dash 5K

Chattahoochee Nature Center

March 23

Harbinger of Spring Hike —

West Palisades

Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area

April 11

Wildflower Moon Campfire and Hike — Sope Creek

Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area

April 12

Sweep the Hooch Cleanup

April 26-27

Headwaters Paddle and Camp

May 8

River Revival

Terminal West

June 14

River Race and Festival

Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area

October 14

20th Anniversary Gala

WELCOME TO KEENA JOHNSON!



At the end of 2013, we said goodbye to Mary Manson, who retired after nearly 15 years as our wonderful receptionist and office caretaker. Formerly with the Captain Planet Foundation, Keena Johnson joined CRK full time this year as our new development associate. She also has assumed Mary's responsibilities, along with other outreach and fundraising activities. Please welcome her the next time you visit our Atlanta office!

GEORGIA WATER COALITION LEADS UNDER THE GOLD DOME

With more than 200 partner organizations representing a quarter of a million people, the **Georgia Water Coalition (GWC)** is the leader in the protection of our waterways at the state Capitol.

GWC members have diverse experiences, including farming, recreation, fishing and boating; however, we all have one thing in common — a deep appreciation and respect for the importance of clean and plentiful water for our families, businesses and future generations. Chattahoochee Riverkeeper is proud to be a member of the coalition's leadership team.

Water rights, emergency response and aquifer protection

The GWC's top legislative priority is to defeat a bill introduced during the 2013 session that amends the Flint River Drought Protection Act (SB 213). As currently written, this bill threatens Georgia's riparian rights system, property rights and taxpayer dollars. It would allow the state to prohibit downstream property owners from withdrawing "augmented" water — a short step from western-type water regulation.

Also on the coalition's legislative agenda are: a bill that mandates a state emergency response program for environmental disasters (HB 549) and a bill that places a permanent, statewide prohibition on the practice of aquifer storage and recovery of water (SB 306).

In recent years, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) has not had the resources to adequately handle environmental emergencies that have threatened public health, communities and property. At the

root of the agency's failure to properly respond is a lack of funding for personnel and training; the divisions' emergency response program is currently at half its pre-recession capacity.

Although the 2014 legislative session is slated to be shorter than usual, water issues will be a priority, and your help is needed through the very last day.



See <http://chattahoochee.org/legislature.php> for updated information and join the Georgia Environmental Action Network at <http://www.protectgeorgia.net/signup.asp>.

TRI-STATE STAKEHOLDERS REMAIN COMMITTED TO WATER PLAN

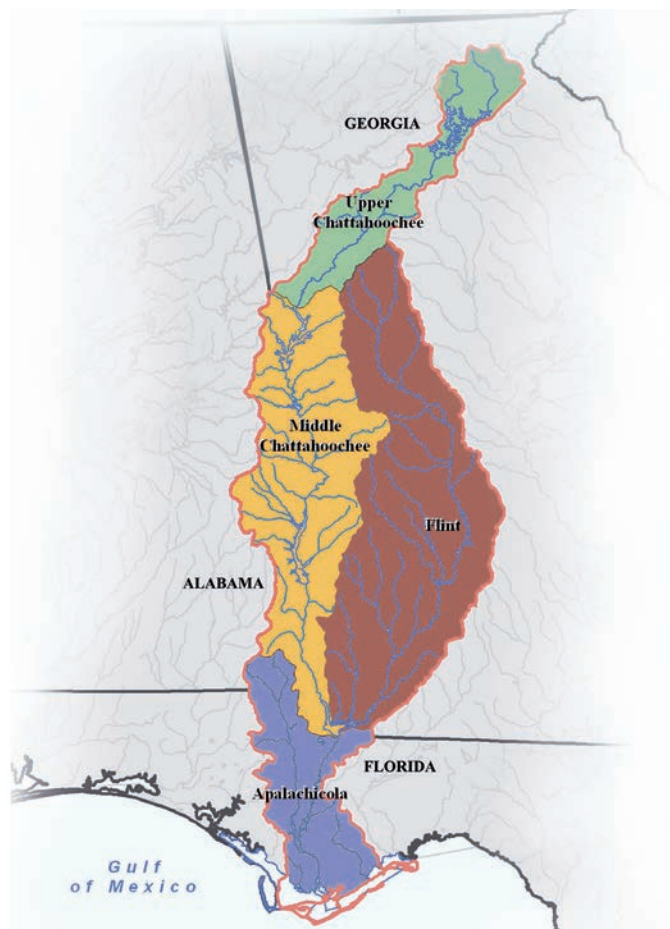
For the past four years, CRK has been an active member of the **Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Stakeholders (ACFS)**, a diverse group of people working collaboratively to develop a sustainable water management plan for the ACF basin.

Given the array of economic, social, and ecological values at stake, the consensus-driven process has proven challenging at times. Until last fall, the stakeholders were able to resolve differences through a transparent, science-driven process. However, events changed the group's dynamics and may threaten its future.

In October, in response to the near collapse of Apalachicola Bay's oyster fishery, Florida filed a lawsuit in the U.S. Supreme Court, asking it to appoint a "special master" to allocate water in the ACF basin to alleviate declining salinity levels in the bay. Florida alleges the drop in salinity is due in part to Georgia's water consumption upstream.

Restrictive policies approved

In December, the ACFS met to address concerns stemming from the Florida lawsuit which were raised by some Georgia stakeholders, primarily those representing metro Atlanta



interests. They were concerned that information generated by the ACFS could be used against Georgia in court.

At that meeting, the governing board approved a more restrictive policy concerning the use of information generated by the group's consultants.

Also in December, the governing board sent a letter to the governors of Georgia, Florida, and Alabama, asking each to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) agreeing to abstain from use of ACFS work products in litigation against one another. Both Alabama and Florida declined to sign the MOU, while Georgia has yet to respond directly to the group's request.

Whether the ACFS will be able to complete a sustainable water management plan under the new restrictions imposed last December remains an open question.

For now, CRK is working with the group to complete the plan for submission to the Army Corps of Engineers in hopes of influencing the agency's update of the ACF Water Control Manual, which will govern operations for all the

federal reservoirs in the ACF basin. For more information, see <http://www.acfstakeholders.org/>.

HOG WASTE FLOWS THROUGH STATE PARK INTO THE RIVER

In November — as the Georgia Board of Natural Resources considered proposed rules to significantly weaken the regulation of hog waste in our state — a two-acre lagoon at an abandoned hog farm in north Georgia was breached. Six million gallons of old bacteria-laden hog waste spilled into Mossy Creek, a tributary to the Chattahoochee River.

Downstream of the breached lagoon, a landowner observed muddy and stinking water flowing past his property and contacted CRK board member **Gary Gaines**. Once alerted, CRK's technical programs director Jason Ulseth conducted a site visit the next morning. His water samples revealed *E. coli* bacteria levels more than four times the federal limit for recreational waters in the gray and foul-smelling creek.

Forty-eight hours after the breach, CRK's headwaters outreach coordinator Duncan Hughes tracked the pollution for more than four miles downstream where he could see a plume of polluted water entering the Chattahoochee River at Mossy Creek State Park in Hall County.

We immediately reported the spill to local officials and the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) who in turn conducted independent inspections. We also reported the incident to the state parks division. Fortunately, the spill did not occur during a period of high recreational use.

EPD found that the lagoon dam had been intentionally breached with a backhoe by a new property owner. Although the lagoon has been permitted by the Georgia Department of Agriculture, that permit ended in 2011, but the lagoon was never properly drained and capped. It was an environmental disaster waiting to happen.

As of early February, EPD was in the process of finalizing an enforcement action to include site stabilization and a monetary fine.

Weakening of hog waste rule averted – for now

In the late 1990s, Georgia's Board of Natural Resources adopted some of the strongest hog rules in the Southeast, after hog waste lagoons failed in North Carolina during a hurricane and contaminated downstream drinking water supplies, recreational areas and property.

Bending to pressure from a handful of hog producers and the Georgia



Photos courtesy of White County News

Commissioner of Agriculture, the EPD proposed new rules last fall for huge factory hog facilities, also known as concentrated animal feeding operations or CAFOs.

This alarming rollback of protections would have endangered water quality and public health. It would have allowed substantially more hog waste in concentrated areas without critical requirements: notice to neighbors, limits on open lagoons and spraying, and wide protective buffers between hog facilities and waterways, drinking water supplies, schools and residences.

Whether it was the outcry from nearly a thousand outraged citizens or the vivid images of hog waste flowing past a landowner's property and through a park, the state board did not consider the proposed rules last December as originally planned. Hopefully, they are now dead.

Questions remain however: How many abandoned hog lagoons threaten waterways and property in the Chattahoochee watershed? Why has the state Department of Agriculture not insisted on proper closure of these facilities as required?

During the next year, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper will investigate the answers to these questions with a goal of averting disasters such as the one that occurred last year at Mossy Creek.



COX ENTERPRISES HONORED AT 19TH ANNUAL PATRON DINNER

Cox Enterprises received CRK's top honor — our River Guardian Award — in October for its award-winning media coverage of environmental issues and its water conservation achievements through the Cox Conserves Program. *See our tribute video at <http://vimeo.com/76580722>.*

More than 400 guests joined CRK's board and staff for our 19th Annual Patron Dinner on October 9 at The Foundry in Atlanta where we honored Cox, UPS (River Sustainability Award), **Jerry McCollum** (River Hero Award) and **Fran Burst** and **Brandon Danowski** (River Awareness Award).



Special thanks all of our 19th Annual Patron Dinner sponsors, who helped us raise \$210,000 to support our river protection programs.



CRK Board Chairman Rutherford Seydel (left) presents River Guardian Award to Cox Media Group President Bill Hoffman (center) and Cox Executive Vice President Alex Taylor.



Sally Bethea, CRK executive director and riverkeeper, welcomes Patron Dinner guests.

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