

West Point Lake Floating Classroom Sails to Success

The West Point Lake Floating Classroom (WPLFC) has quickly found its place in the Middle Chattahoochee region, serving as the only on-the-water educational resource for school groups of all ages, as well as the community at large.



Modeled after Chattahoochee Riverkeeper's successful program on Lake Lanier, the WPLFC has served nearly 4,500 students and adults since launching in the fall of 2015. Initial expectations for the program were high, but the immediate and enthusiastic support of students, teachers and local citizens has surpassed our goals.

Generous contributions from individuals, foundations and local businesses have allowed us to offer this exceptional program at no cost to underserved communities and Title I schools.

First and foremost, the WPLFC is an education program that teaches science, ecology, history, and math in accordance with STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) goals and Georgia and Alabama Performance Standards.

Guided lake tours and special programs such as wildlife, history and music cruises are also offered for community groups, summer camps and others onboard our 44-passenger vessel, the *Miss Sally*, which is docked at Highland Marina Resort.



CRK staff (L-R) Hannah Bradford, Laura Breyfogle and Henry Jacobs and Boat Captain Jim West take students from The West Georgia Boys & Girls Club on a voyage of discovery on West Point Lake.

For students and adults alike, this field experience can be life-changing: a first time on a boat, a first outing on West Point Lake, an exceptional teaching opportunity. Elementary school teacher Jennifer Pineda told us: "The West Point Lake Floating Classroom was the best field trip experience I've had in my seventeen years of teaching."

"What a great way for our students to see science in action!"

Tammy Eason, Eastside Elementary, Coweta County

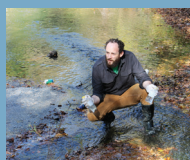
Every 6th grade public school student in Troup County will experience the WPLFC this spring, a learning adventure made possible by financial support from the **Callaway Foundation** and generous individuals. Schools in Carrollton, Columbus, Franklin, Newnan and Eastern Alabama are signing up thanks to support from **Kia, City of LaGrange, Alice Richards Foundation, Ray C. Anderson Foundation** and **Dave and Mary Jane Kirkpatrick**.

You can provide scholarships for deserving students to experience this one-of-a-kind educational program in 2017 by giving \$500 for a class, \$250 for ten students, \$100 for four or \$25 for one. To learn more about the program, schedule a program or make a donation, contact Laura Breyfogle at lbreyfogle@chattahoochee.org.

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

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Reflections

The past year has been a weather-induced roller coaster ride and the impacts on the river system have been quite dramatic to watch.

Think back to Christmas 2015. Not only was it the warmest Christmas in recorded history, but metro Atlanta got slammed with about four inches of rain in one day. The result: serious flooding, polluted runoff and a jump in the water level at Lake Lanier of five feet above the normal pool.

As we celebrated the new year and entered 2016, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which operates Buford Dam, began to drain Lanier to the normal water level. And drain they did! For the first few months of last year, the Chattahoochee River downstream of the dam was constantly on the brink of flood stage. At one point, several parks and roads in Roswell even flooded due to the water releases.

Then someone turned off the faucet

After a wet winter and spring with constant deluges racing downstream, it was almost like someone turned off the faucet. The flow in the river returned to the seasonal normal after



Lake Lanier finally reached its full pool elevation, and then the rain suddenly dried up.

By early summer, it was evident that we were quickly transitioning into a drought and Lake Lanier started dropping. As we neared Thanksgiving, we were still seeing record high or near record high temperatures — and Lanier was ten feet below normal pool, a fifteen foot drop in eleven months!

The term “normal” is losing meaning when describing river flows and lake elevations. It will be interesting to see what the future has in store.

In the meantime, it is evident that this drought is going to continue well into 2017, despite December rains, and we must all do everything we can to conserve water. It also seems like a good time to study the feasibility of raising the full pool of Lake Lanier to help curb the dramatic impacts that a changing climate is already having on our beloved river system.

JASON ULSETH
Riverkeeper

Faces of the Chattahoochee



Photo courtesy of Bard Wrisley

My love for the Chattahoochee started ten years ago when I cast a fly into **Dukes Creek**, a tributary near the Sautee Nacoochee community, and hooked my first Georgia trout. Or, maybe that trout hooked me. I think the Chattahoochee is a river lover's paradise; its beauty equals the most storied Western rivers and its fishing diversity is enough to keep any angler busy all year. Last fall, I hiked with CRK members to the spring where it all begins. To see the spring was so inspirational - almost magical. From there, the water descends almost 2000 feet, gaining speed as it's recharged by tributaries. The Chattahoochee is one beautiful mountain river.

— John Shaw
Sautee Nacoochee

River Buffer Destroyed in Habersham County

Nearly 400 linear feet of forested stream buffer along the Chattahoochee was cleared of all vegetation just downstream of the **SR 255** crossing in Habersham County. The property owner applied for a state buffer variance in 2011 to perform "river restoration" activities; however, when the work started last fall, CRK received Hotline calls from concerned citizens. We learned that not only were best management practices not installed to protect the river, but also that the applicant had failed to obtain all required permits. We are working with local and state agencies to ensure that this buffer is properly restored.

Apollo Chemical Spill Still a Problem

In August, we received an urgent Hotline report of a large chemical spill in Smyrna at Apollo Technologies, a chemical contract packager. We immediately reported the incident to emergency response officials who were already en route to the site. A 2,500-gallon tank containing carburetor cleaner had erupted during the night and Apollo employees were caught on video the next morning hosing the chemicals into nearby storm drains. The spill resulted in a major fish kill in a tributary to **Nickajack Creek** which flows into the Chattahoochee. While government response teams were initially impressive, cleanup efforts have been disappointing. While the state government response was initially impressive, long-term cleanup efforts have been disappointing. CRK's data still shows high levels of contamination and we continue to monitor federal remediation efforts.



Coal Ash Contaminates Groundwater

Georgia Power has pledged to shutter all coal ash storage ponds in the state by 2019. As a part of this closure process, the company conducted monitoring to detect any groundwater contamination by coal ash at **Plants McDonough, Wansley and Yates** along the Chattahoochee. Initial results detected arsenic, beryllium, cadmium and selenium at two facilities: McDonough and Yates. At McDonough, arsenic concentrations were twice the federal standard. At Yates, beryllium spiked at three times the standard. These elements are linked to human health concerns including cancer, nerve damage, and reproductive problems. These elements are linked to human health concerns including cancer, nerve damage, and reproductive problems. CRK is monitoring these sites and the state process for closure of the coal ash ponds.

North Fulton Sewer Line Finally Gets Attention

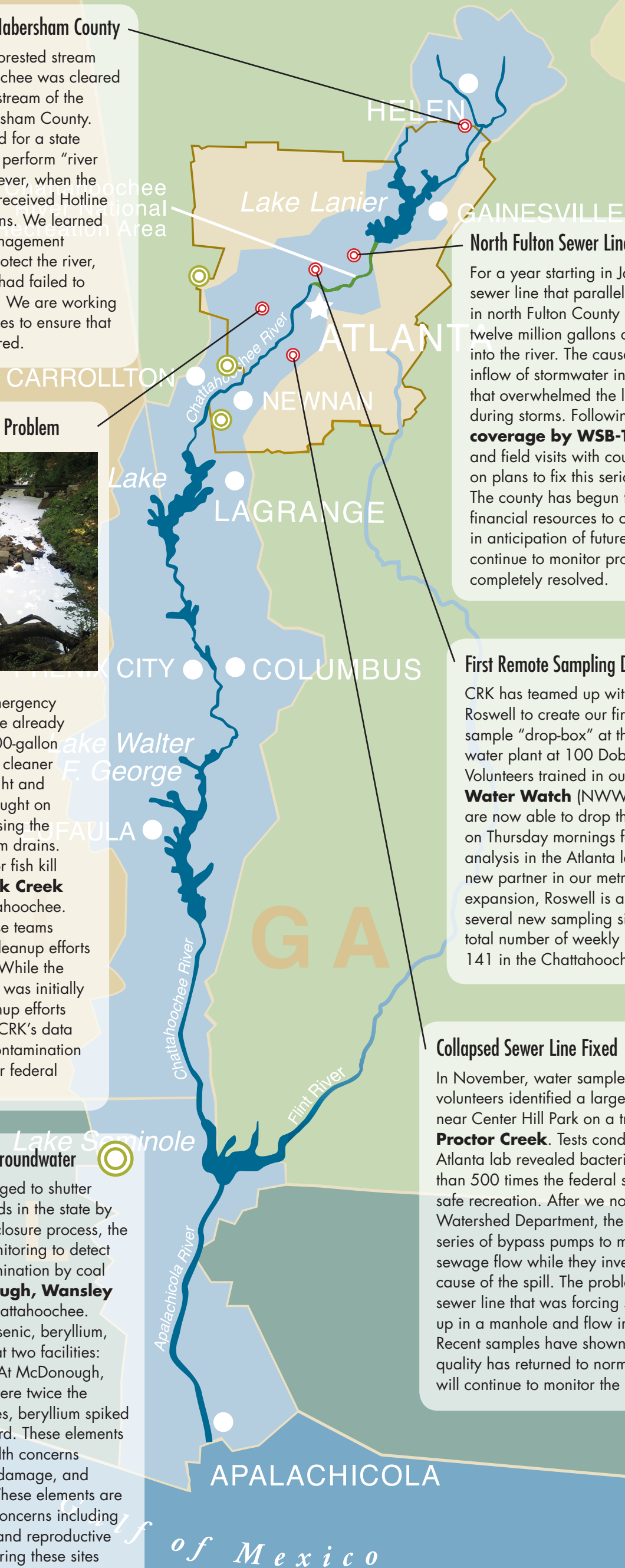
For a year starting in January 2015, a single sewer line that parallels the Chattahoochee in north Fulton County spewed more than twelve million gallons of untreated sewage into the river. The cause: unintentional inflow of stormwater into the sewer line that overwhelmed the line's capacity during storms. Following in-depth **media coverage by WSB-TV**, CRK held meetings and field visits with county staff to insist on plans to fix this serious health hazard. The county has begun to invest significant financial resources to correct the problems in anticipation of future rain events. CRK will continue to monitor progress until the issue is completely resolved.

First Remote Sampling Drop-Box in Roswell

CRK has teamed up with the City of Roswell to create our first remote water sample "drop-box" at the city's drinking water plant at 100 Dobbs Drive. Volunteers trained in our **Neighborhood Water Watch (NWW)** program are now able to drop their samples on Thursday mornings for pick-up and analysis in the Atlanta lab. A great new partner in our metro area NWW expansion, Roswell is also sponsoring several new sampling sites, bringing the total number of weekly sampling sites to 141 in the Chattahoochee basin!

Collapsed Sewer Line Fixed

In November, water samples taken by our volunteers identified a large sewer spill near Center Hill Park on a tributary to **Proctor Creek**. Tests conducted in CRK's Atlanta lab revealed bacteria levels more than 500 times the federal standard for safe recreation. After we notified Atlanta's Watershed Department, the city set up a series of bypass pumps to manage the sewage flow while they investigated the cause of the spill. The problem: a collapsed sewer line that was forcing sewage to back up in a manhole and flow into the creek. Recent samples have shown that water quality has returned to normal levels; CRK will continue to monitor the situation.



MEET CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVERKEEPER'S FLEET!



The Chota Princess II

CRK is the only entity — governmental or non-governmental — to routinely patrol and test water quality in the river between Buford Dam and West Point Lake. In order to navigate the rocky shoals that are present throughout this 115 mile stretch of Chattahoochee River, no ordinary boat would suffice. CRK's patrol boat was custom-built by Oquawka Boats in Illinois and designed down to every minute detail by Harlan Trammell and Riverkeeper Jason Ulseth.

Our patrol boat is powered by a 150 HP Yamaha outboard engine that was converted to a 105 HP Jet Drive. By changing the engine to a Jet Drive, the boat can run without a traditional propeller and navigate the river in as little as three inches of water. Not only can the patrol boat shoot through unbelievably shallow water, she is built as tough as a tank. The entire outer hull is constructed with one quarter inch thick aluminum, which is literally bulletproof. This means that if the boat does bump or rub a rock in the shoals, no damage is sustained.



CRK's Patrol Boat



The Miss Sally

The *Chota Princess II*, *Chota* for short, lives at **Aqualand Marina** in Gainesville and serves as the Lake Lanier Aquatic Learning Center (LLALC), an award-winning education program started in 2000. She is the second vessel for the LLALC and was launched in the summer of 2007. Built by Corinthian Catamarans and custom-rigged by CRK's former boat captain Harlan Trammell, the *Chota* measures at forty feet long and ten feet wide. She is powered by twin 225 HP Honda outboard engines and is certified to carry up to fifty-two passengers.

Between the months of March and November, the *Chota* can often be spotted on Lake Lanier near Three Sisters Islands, as she runs upwards of fifteen to twenty school trips on busy weeks. More than 5,000 students and teachers come from all across metro Atlanta to experience a truly unique hands-on learning experience each year. The *Chota* is also chartered for special outings and tours. Visit chattahoochee.org for 2017 outings.

Following the tremendous success of the Lake Lanier floating classroom program on board the *Chota Princess II*, we began the process of building a second floating classroom boat for West Point Lake in 2014. After a nine-month long construction period by The American Pontoon Company, the *Miss Sally* was launched on West Point Lake in July 2015.

Named after CRK's founding riverkeeper Sally Bethea, the *Miss Sally* is a forty-two foot long TriToon vessel capable of carry up to forty-four passengers. She is powered by new state-of-the art 150 HP twin Suzuki outboard engines. Today, the *Miss Sally* is home to the West Point Lake Floating Classroom and hosts several thousand students and teachers from the Middle Chattahoochee region every year, in addition to wildlife, history and music programs for all ages. See page 1 for more on the West Point Lake Floating Classroom.

Thank you to all our members and donors for helping us keep watch over our waters!

July through December 2016

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Together we can protect and restore Georgia's Chattahoochee River, its tributaries & watershed, both now and for future generations.

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Pollution Levels Plummet in Proctor Creek

Pollution tracking requires technical expertise, persistence, a certain fearlessness — and sometimes a little help from man’s best friend.

Mike Meyer (*pictured below*) still remembers the dog that unexpectedly jumped through a hole in a chain link fence, showing him one of the few ways to access a creek in northwest Atlanta suspected of being polluted with sewage. He was scouting for locations to take water samples on a tributary to Proctor Creek, as part of Chattahoochee Riverkeeper’s Neighborhood Water Watch (NWW) program — a highly-successful initiative that Mike has managed for the past four years.

Today, more than 100 visits later, Mike nimbly squeezes through the dog’s hole in the fence with his sampling equipment, after saying hello to the folks he regularly sees in the community. He’s told them that he’s checking the water and working to stop the pollution — and that he doesn’t work for the government.

While he can’t tell the residents that this urban stream is totally clean yet, Mike and CRK are celebrating a major victory, along with our volunteers and partners.

Recent tests show that *E. coli* bacteria levels in the tributary — once a thousand times the federal standard for public health — have decreased by seventy-five percent! As a result, the water in Proctor Creek is measurably safer for the surrounding community and wildlife, although there is still work to be done.

Fifteen Illegal Sewer Connections Found

Proctor Creek was once considered one of the most-polluted streams in the City of Atlanta. The nine-mile waterway begins in downtown Atlanta and flows downstream under Hollowell Parkway, past the Bellwood Quarry and under Jackson Parkway before entering the Chattahoochee River.

For decades, overflows from the city’s combined storm and sewer system spewed pollution into Proctor Creek 60-80 times per year — a public health hazard of enormous proportion.

In the early 1990s, two mini-treatment combined sewer overflow (CSO) facilities were constructed to screen and chlorinate the

water before it was discharged into the stream. One of the facilities (known as Greensferry) was built on the tributary mentioned above. Both were failures.

As part of the settlement of CRK’s 1995 lawsuit against the city for its failure to meet clean water standards at the CSO facilities and elsewhere, the pipes in the combined Greensferry CSO watershed were separated and the facility de-commissioned. In

other words, the sewer lines were re-directed to a sewage treatment plant, while the stormwater continued to flow into creeks.

Water quality improved significantly, but problems remained.

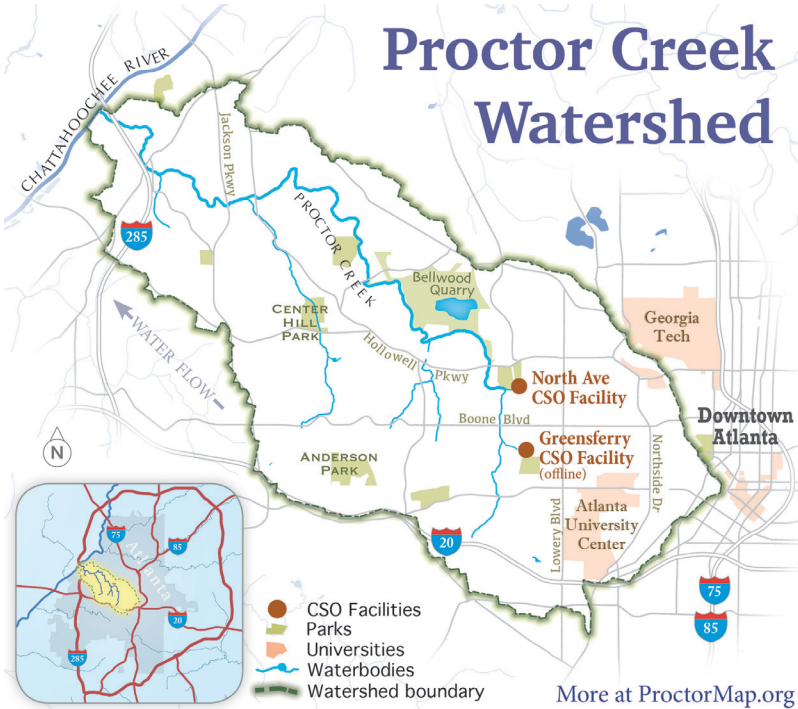
In 2010, we began working with local residents and neighborhood groups to test water through our NWW program, an effort that has expanded to twenty monitoring locations in the Proctor Creek watershed; samples are collected by community volunteers trained in U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) procedures. To our knowledge, CRK’s bacteria

monitoring initiative in the Proctor Creek watershed is the most comprehensive such program in the state of Georgia.

Spurred by CRK’s NWW data (329 water samples) and increasing pressure from the community, the city conducted an extensive investigation. Ultimately, fifteen illegal sewer connections were found at the decommissioned Greensferry facility and disconnected, stopping most of the flow of sewage into the Proctor tributary.

Proctor Creek and the surrounding community have received a great deal of well-deserved attention in recent years. EPA has declared the stream a National Urban Waters, making federal resources available for restoration initiatives. The city and many nonprofits, corporations and foundations have invested in the human and capital infrastructure in an attempt to revive a long-struggling community.

CRK could not do this work without the support and participation of the Proctor Creek community and financial resources provided by **The Turner Foundation, The Kendeda Fund, The James M. Cox Foundation, Courts Foundation, EPA, Drs. Sally and Peter Parsonson, Harland Foundation** and others.



At the State Capitol: Legislative Preview

When the Georgia General Assembly resumed work in early January, CRK and our partners in the Georgia Water Coalition were there to protect our natural resources. CRK's new policy director Chris Manganiello is on board to expand our ability to advance our environmental priorities. This year, they include: securing protective buffers on all state waters, protecting our groundwater from power plants' coal ash waste, and preventing oil and gas companies from using eminent domain to take private property to build pipelines.

Protecting Stream Buffers

Vegetative buffers along our rivers and streams help keep water clean and protect property values for waterfront landowners and those downstream. The state restricted activities in these streamside zones, until a policy change in 2014 left stretches of our streams, rivers, and lakes unprotected.

During the 2016 General Assembly session, legislators attempted to improve this law to equally protect all of Georgia's waterways, but inexplicably the state Environmental Protection Division (EPD) actively opposed the efforts to fix this problem. We will champion a proposed bill with strong bipartisan support to reestablish buffers on all waterways that EPD left vulnerable after its policy change.

Safeguarding Groundwater

Coal ash waste stored in ponds at Georgia Power plants across the state poses a potential threat to groundwater resources. We will urge the legislature to adopt laws that prevent coal ash from contaminating well water or being disposed of at ill-equipped municipal landfills. Legislation must address the safe storage



Chris Manganiello, PhD, CRK's new water policy director, speaks to a gathering of the Georgia Water Coalition.

of coal ash in Georgia, preferably in lined landfills on Georgia Power's properties and located away from our vulnerable rivers.

Evaluating Pipelines Proposals

In recent years, out-of-state corporations accelerated efforts to locate new petroleum and natural gas pipeline routes in Georgia. They have used eminent domain to take Georgian's private property for these energy corridors. Georgia legislators should pass state law prohibiting the use of eminent domain to take private property for construction of pipelines that provide no benefit for Georgians. Similarly, we are advancing a resolution urging Georgia's Congressional delegation to reform the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which issues licenses for gas pipelines, to provide greater protections for landowners.

Riverkeepers File Brief in Water Wars Case

The legal battle between Florida, Georgia, and Alabama over water in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) River Basin which straddles all three states has reached the nation's highest court. While many hope this will be the last lawsuit in the three-decade saga, the outcome may leave all states unhappy.

In 2013, Florida filed a lawsuit in the U.S. Supreme Court against Georgia to limit the water Georgia may consume from the Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers which flow into Florida's Apalachicola River. Florida argued that high water consumption by Georgia prevented enough water from flowing downstream into the Apalachicola Bay, resulting in higher salinity levels that have harmed the oyster fishery. Georgia argued that Florida overharvested its fishery causing a collapse in 2012.

Special Master Oversees Trial

The Court appointed a "Special Master" to oversee the trial, which began on Halloween and wrapped up in mid-December. CRK staff monitored the trial in Maine and reported back to our members, partner organizations and the press.

Along with our fellow riverkeepers — Gordon Rogers of the Flint and Dan Tonsmeire of the Apalachicola — CRK has promoted a shared goal: to convince the Court to consider the river system's ecological health in addition to the economic impacts represented by the states.

Represented by Emory's Turner Environmental Clinic, CRK, Flint Riverkeeper and Alabama Rivers Alliance filed a brief showing the legal authority for the Court to consider the ecological health of the rivers in its findings. Apalachicola Riverkeeper submitted a brief focused on the unique environmental conditions of its river and bay.

In the coming months, the Special Master is expected to issue his recommendation to the Supreme Court regarding water consumption in metro Atlanta and southwest Georgia and the volume that must be left in the rivers for downstream users. With our partners, CRK will continue to advocate for a healthy and sustainable river basin with water allocations for all users that are fair and equitable.



Ambassador Andrew Young, Others Honored at Annual Dinner

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper kicked off the fall season with an evening of celebration, awards and competitive auction bidding at CRK’s 22nd Annual Patron Dinner. On September 28, 2016, nearly 450 supporters, local business leaders, community partners and other distinguished guests gathered at The Foundry at Puritan Mill. The annual event was a resounding success, raising \$260,000 for CRK’s advocacy and education programs.



(L-R) Riverkeeper Jason Ulseth, Executive Director Juliet Cohen and CRK Board Chair Rutherford Seydel congratulate Ambassador Andrew Young (C).

We honored **Drs. Sally and Pete Parsonson** with our *River Guardian Award* for providing more than a decade of critical support for our fleet of boats and trucks, laboratories for monitoring water quality and mentorship and guidance for our staff and board.

Ambassador Andrew Young received our *River Leader Award* for his role in authoring and helping pass legislation to create the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. On the 100th Anniversary of the National Park Service, we were privileged to recognize Ambassador Young’s lifetime of public service. Other honorees: **Charles Smith** (*River Steward Award*), **Ericsson** (*River Sustainability Award*) and **Bill Cox** (*River Hero Award*).

MANY THANKS TO ALL OF OUR SPONSORS!

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CRK Regional Outreach Manager Henry Jacobs (far right) greets River Steward Award honoree Charles Smith and friends from the Middle Chattahoochee region. (L-R) Bob Harris, Ellen Harris, Jeannie Smith, Charles Smith and Rodney Cook.

Twenty-Five Tons of Trash Out of the River!

In 2016, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper removed more than twenty-five tons of trash and tires from the watershed with the help of more than a thousand volunteers and recycled ten percent of the volume!

In fact, we’ve been picking up trash from the river, its lakes and tributaries since we got started in 1994; our biggest annual haul was in 1998 when 568 tons of man-made debris were removed by professional teams from thirty-seven miles of Chattahoochee tributaries in the City of Atlanta. That massive effort was a requirement of the settlement of CRK’s lawsuit against Atlanta for failing to comply with clean water laws.

Getting dirty builds teamwork

Some of our most productive trash cleanup partners are corporations. **Cox Enterprises, Cox Automotive, UPS, Colonial Pipeline, MillerCoors, Porsche, SweetWater Brewing and Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta** participated last year by hosting cleanup events for their employees. Our corporate partners believe that trash cleanups are effective and satisfying projects that build community ties and improve employee morale.

UPS’s Mary Schrepfer says: “Participating in CRK cleanups affords our teams the ability to learn more about the issues related to our water supply, while building camaraderie and providing a shared sense of purpose.”

While twenty-five is the most tonnage we have removed in recent years, not long ago our volunteers removed eighty tons in one year! That year was 2009, when an exceptional drought dropped water levels significantly, providing excellent

conditions for trash removal. To date, CRK, its volunteers and partners have pulled nearly 850 tons of trash from the Chattahoochee River system.

With 2017 shaping up to be another record drought year with low water levels, CRK is preparing to take advantage of these conditions. See our calendar of watershed outings and cleanups on the back cover of this newsletter and join us as a member or with your corporate team!



Cox Enterprises team of 80 volunteers cleanup Tanyard Creek.

Join us OUTDOORS IN 2017!

MIDDLE CHATTAHOOCHEE PADDLE March 25

Paddle a remote, ten-mile section of the river from Whitesburg to **Chattahoochee Bend State Park** in Coweta County — one of Georgia's newest parks. Open to paddlers of all skill levels.

7TH ANNUAL SWEEP THE HOOCH April 8

Help us clean up the Chattahoochee by walking, wading or paddling! CRK, **Upper Chattahoochee Chapter of Trout Unlimited** and the **National Park Service** are again organizing a massive, one-day cleanup at more than forty sites along the river from the Headwaters to West Point Lake with a focus on the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area.



EARTH DAY SOQUE RIVER PADDLE CLEANUP April 22

Join us and the **Soque River Watershed Association** for a rare opportunity to paddle the largely-private Soque from the Hwy 105 Bridge to Wildwood Outfitters at Duncan Bridge. We'll pick up trash while enjoying four miles of this Headwaters stream.



CHATTAHOOCHEE VALLEY RIVER REVIVAL May 6

Float three miles from West Point Dam (Hardley Creek Park) to the **West Point River Park**. Then, hang out at the park for live music, good local food and the screening of river-inspired films.

WILD & SCENIC FILM FESTIVAL Gainesville May 13

Be awed and inspired at this popular film festival where you'll see the Earth's beauty and learn about the challenges facing our planet and the work that communities are doing to protect the environment.

15TH ANNIVERSARY BACK TO THE CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER RACE & FESTIVAL May 20

Watch - or join - racers as they take to the water to see who can make it to **Roswell's Riverside Park** in record time! The eight-mile river race is open to paddlers of all ages. A festival follows at the finish line with exhibitors, arts and crafts, local businesses, Frisbee dogs, kid-friendly fun and live music.

CHATTAHOOCHEE
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If you prefer to receive RiverCHAT electronically, contact Christina York at cyork@chattahoochee.org.



Download the **CRK App for iPhone and Android** mobile devices from the App Store for FREE and have access to CRK's Hotline program to Report a Problem, Events Calendar, Watershed Map, and more on the go.

CHESTATEE RIVER PADDLE June 3

Paddle the Chestatee River, a tributary to the Chattahoochee and the former home of the Cherokee Indians. We'll start on remote and beautiful **Yahoola Creek**, which flows into the most popular stretch of the Chestatee — eight and a half miles in total.

FULL MOON BLUES CRUISE FEATURING JONTAVIOUS WILLIS June 8

Join us aboard the *Miss Sally* for an evening cruise on **West Point Lake** with live blues performed by Jontavious Willis. You'll also learn about CRK's programs in the Middle Chattahoochee River region, while you enjoy the moon-lit lake.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CRK
OUTINGS VISIT CHATTAHOOCHEE.ORG.**