RIVERCHAT

Winter 2019 *A publication of Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (CRK)*

$2.1 BILLION IN CLEAN WATER BENEFITS FOR OUR RIVER

Twenty-five years ago, Atlanta's Turner Foundation provided a seed grant of $50,000 to a brand-new, nonprofit organization, now called Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (CRK).

Our mission—to restore and protect the Chattahoochee River: a daunting task given the filthy condition of the waterway below the city of Atlanta, at that time, and the massive volume of polluted stormwater that flowed, uncontrolled, into the river after every rainstorm.

In the intervening years, you and thousands of donors like you invested $28 million in CRK, understanding that it would take significant financial and volunteer resources to accomplish our goals. In honor of CRK's 25th anniversary, we compiled a record of accomplishments and found that our actions resulted in the expenditure of more than $2.1 billion by government agencies, developers, industries and landowners to help restore the river, its lakes and tributaries.

Today, we are extremely proud to announce that every single dollar contributed has resulted in at least $75 in measurable benefits to the people, communities and wildlife in the Chattahoochee River watershed. With the leadership of our board of directors and staff—and the help of thousands of members and volunteers—we have collectively transformed our most critical resource: the lifeblood of the region and source of drinking water for more than five million people.

CRK's earliest, and likely most-recognized initiative, was our 1995 lawsuit against the City of Atlanta to correct its failing sewer and stormwater systems which regularly dumped raw sewage into the river and the streams flowing through neighborhoods. Comparing water quality data from the 1990s to the samples we collect today, we can conclude that, following the major investment by the city to overhaul its storm and sewer infrastructure, bacteria levels in the Chattahoochee downstream of Atlanta are 80% lower than they were three decades ago. Former Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin has said that those investments yielded "nearly $18 billion" in new public and private investment in the city.

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- Juliet Cohen, Executive Director, *Chattahoochee Riverkeeper*

An entire region has taken notice of these clean water benefits and the Chattahoochee is viewed in a new light—as an amenity rather than a drainage ditch for the city's waste. Local and state governments are opening new riverside parks; community groups are collaborating to develop a master plan for new parks, hiking trails, boat ramps and bicycle paths; and developers are building live-work-play communities along the once-polluted river.

While much progress has been made, the greatest threat to the Chattahoochee River system today is stormwater runoff from construction sites, industries, roads and other impervious surfaces. In our role as the environmental lead in state-convened negotiations, we have used our field experience from 1200 site investigations to strengthen and clarify environmental regulations. As one example, the largest land-disturber in the state—the Georgia DOT—must now reduce the substantial impacts from runoff associated with its constructed roads. In addition to significant policy improvements, CRK's actions to date have resulted in the investment of more than $27 million in site-specific improvements to stop polluted runoff from entering nearby streams.

This spring, we will publish a report outlining 25 years of accomplishments. Join us in celebrating our Silver Anniversary! At chattahoochee.org, learn about the Relay Down the Hooch, Youth Summit, and 25th Anniversary Patron Dinner. Importantly, thank you for supporting us in this journey to protect and preserve our Chattahoochee River.

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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 LOOKING BACK ON THE PAST 25 YEARS

When Chattahoochee Riverkeeper was founded in 1994 by Rutherford and Laura Seydel, I was a freshman in high school. Sally Bethea was just taking the reins as our first Riverkeeper as I was navigating the bullies and cliques of a mid-90's high school. Sally wasted no time hitting the headlines and I remember seeing news about a pollution lawsuit against the City of Atlanta the following year. I followed the story with interest as I loved to fish on the Hooch, but really had no idea just how big of a deal the lawsuit was.

Over the next few years, the lawsuit and resultant settlement churned on and I transitioned to life at the University of Georgia to study Environmental Health Science. I followed Sally's work from afar and even took a trip on CRK's floating classroom boat on Lake Lanier with my UGA hydrology class. After graduation, CRK came up on my radar more and more as I climbed up the ranks in state government. In 2007, I found myself sitting across from Sally in a job interview for CRK's Watershed Protection Specialist position.

I have now been on staff for almost half of the organization's 25 year history. I wasn't there for the early success of the famous Atlanta suit, but I have been a part of some extraordinary river victories and have seen the transformation of the Chattahoochee River downstream of Atlanta. The Chattahoochee is now cleaner than it has been in decades and looking back on CRK's incredible work over the past 25 years it is truly inspiring. I am proud to be a member of this unbelievable team, and I am excited for the next 25 years as we welcome our future river protection guardians.

Jason Ulseth

Jason Ulseth, RIVERKEEPER

PEGGY AMEND
CRK volunteer and avid kayaker

"The Chattahoochee gives me a place to find peace and serenity in an otherwise crazy world."

Peggy Amend first started volunteering for CRK at the 2008 Back to the Chatt River Race and Festival. Since then she hasn't stopped. From managing the timing for the River Race each year and picking up trash at cleanups, to helping guests at the annual Patron Dinner, Peggy has been a committed volunteer for 10 years! These days she is an avid kayaker, too, hitting the river whenever she can. What drives her? "The Chattahoochee gives me a place to find peace and serenity in an otherwise crazy world."

ON PATROL WITH CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVERKEEPER

STEEL WIRE MANUFACTURER OUT OF COMPLIANCE

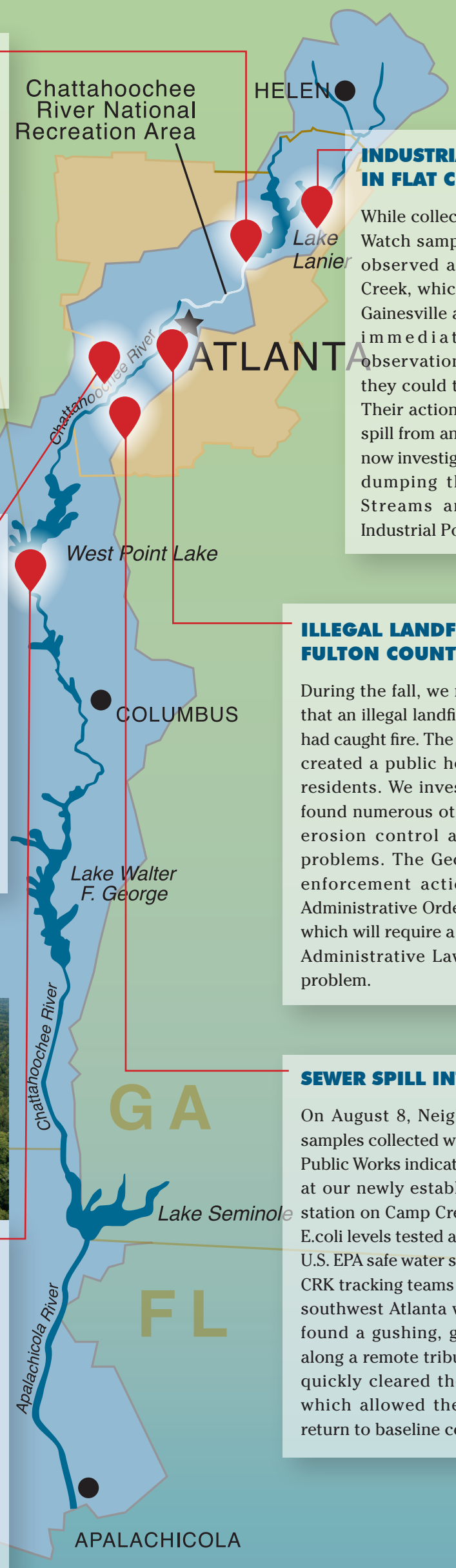
CRK discovered that Koswire, a steel wire manufacturer located on Flowery Branch upstream from Lake Lanier, is not following clean stormwater laws. During a site investigation, we found a number of alarming characteristics, including bright blue staining on the surfaces adjacent to Koswire's building. The release of heavy metals such as zinc, lead, arsenic and copper is a concern. After several attempts to communicate with Koswire went ignored, we filed a letter of intent to sue within 60 days.

DOG RIVER RESERVOIR EXPANSION RAISES QUESTIONS

Douglas County seeks to significantly expand an existing water supply reservoir to address recurring dry and/or low flow conditions. Without improvements, problems within the reservoir would be exacerbated by climate change. CRK's chief concern—and reason for not supporting the project—is the lack of a guaranteed instream flow requirement below the new dam. It's also worth noting this proposal represents more evidence that Georgia communities recognize climate change is real and are adapting.

SOLAR FIELD IN ALABAMA CAUSES EROSION, SEDIMENTATION PROBLEMS

During a drone flyover of the Chattahoochee River below West Point Dam, we observed a large plume of murky, brown-gray sediment flowing from Osilegee Creek, just upstream of the City of West Point's drinking water intake. Further investigation revealed the source of the sediment to be an 1,100 acre solar field site where we discovered numerous and significant violations of the Clean Water Act. We reported the violations to the U.S. EPA, and have held a series of meetings with the builder and owner in an effort to resolve the problems and begin the process of returning the watershed to health.



INDUSTRIAL MOTOR OIL SPILL IN FLAT CREEK

While collecting Neighborhood Water Watch samples, a headwaters intern observed a sheen and odor in Flat Creek, which runs through midtown Gainesville and into Lake Lanier. CRK immediately reported our observations to city employees so they could track the suspected spill. Their actions led them to a motor oil spill from an industrial facility. We are now investigating the facility for illegal dumping through our Protecting Streams and Communities from Industrial Pollution program.

ILLEGAL LANDFILL IN SOUTH FULTON COUNTY

During the fall, we received several reports that an illegal landfill in south Fulton County had caught fire. The fire burned for weeks and created a public health hazard for nearby residents. We investigated the landfill and found numerous other violations, including erosion control and stormwater runoff problems. The Geogia EPD is leading the enforcement action and has issued an Administrative Order to the property owner, which will require a formal hearing before an Administrative Law Judge to address the problem.

SEWER SPILL INTO CAMP CREEK

On August 8, Neighborhood Water Watch samples collected with partner Fulton County Public Works indicated sewage contamination at our newly established water monitoring station on Camp Creek at Welcome All Road. E.coli levels tested at more than 300 times the U.S. EPA safe water standard, which prompted CRK tracking teams to work their way up the southwest Atlanta waterway. Ultimately, we found a gushing, grease-clogged manhole along a remote tributary. The City of Atlanta quickly cleared the disrupted sewer line, which allowed the affected waterway to return to baseline conditions.

For more information, visit: chattahoochee.org/our-work/enforcing-environmental-laws

OUR 2018 ACCOMPLISHMENTS BY THE NUMBERS

WATER MONITORING

180 Neighborhood Water Watch (NWW) monitoring stations

5,207 Samples collected and analyzed by NWW

117 NWW Partners

17 Major sewer spills found

8 Years as #1 Adopt-A-Stream group

107 Nutrient samples from Lakes Lanier and West Point collected and analyzed

150 BacteriAlert samples

3 Real-time water quality sensors deployed

ADVOCACY

37 Letters and testimony to environmental agencies on permits and rules

207 Industrial sites investigated

251 Citizen hotline reports

130 Field investigations

31 Hotline enforcement actions

$250,000 Settlement funds directed to environmental organizations

EDUCATION

8,548 Students and adults on the Lake Lanier and West Point Lake Floating Classrooms

4,015 Students receiving full scholarship to floating classrooms

26 Interns trained

656 Rain barrels distributed

80 Industrial facility managers and inspectors trained in stormwater compliance

OUTINGS & TRASH CLEANUPS

348 Paddlers on the river

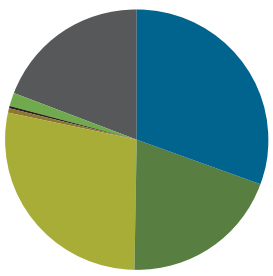
1,159 Volunteers removing trash

32 Tons of trash removed from the watershed

2.8 Tons of refuse recycled

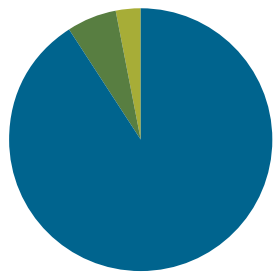
1,289 New members

2017 FINANCIALS



Income

Foundations	$630,635
Individuals	$400,174
Corporations	$577,380
Government	$13,075
Legal	$22,000
Noncash Donated Services	$35,549
Capacity Campaign	$390,020



Expenses

Programs	$2,225,913
Administrative	$148,815
Fundraising	$74,430

★★★★ CHARITY NAVIGATOR Four Star Charity

11 consecutive years!

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR MEMBERS AND DONORS

FOR HELPING US KEEP WATCH OVER OUR WATERS!

July 2018 through December 2018

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With your help, we stand strong to ensure our drinking water is clean and safe and that our Chattahoochee River system is protected for us now and for future generations. Please become a member today by visiting chattahoochee.org/become-a-member-or-renew.

A LEADER AMONG US

"I can't imagine a more worthy cause that one can take part in. Simply put, this program saves lives." - Cullen McClure

Cullen has been fly fishing his entire life, a passion he inherited from his mother and grandparents. Today, he shares his passion for fly fishing, and the healing powers of the Chattahoochee River, with hundreds of injured and disabled military service personnel and disabled veterans as a volunteer with Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing (PHWFF). "My mental and physical health benefit from my connection to water; I'd hate to see what would happen if we didn't have the 'Hooch to share with one another," says McClure.

Founded in 2005, Project Healing Waters has more than 200 chapters, including one in Atlanta. In 2018, they served more than 8,000 veterans across the country through fly tying lessons, rod building, casting instruction and guided fishing trips. "I can't imagine a more worthy cause that one can take part in. Simply put, this program saves lives."

Cullen's service to the river community goes beyond PHWFF as he is also the President of the Upper Chattahoochee Chapter of Trout Unlimited (UCCTU) based in Roswell. In 2018, UCCTU launched the #cleanmywater campaign to tackle the trash problem in and around our waterways. The social media campaign aims to engage a younger demographic, which is underrepresented in river protection. "We hope that a photo of a net full of trash or an old computer monitor on the banks will stop you from blindly scrolling through your feed and make you think."

Both groups are important river stakeholders and CRK partners. "With Cullen taking the lead at UCCTU, and his continued work with PHWFF, we can expect that our partnerships, both on and off the water, will continue to grow and benefit even more people in the years to come," said Riverkeeper, Jason Ulseth.

To learn more about Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, visit projecthealingwaters.org.
For more on the Upper Chattahoochee Chapter of Trout Unlimited, visit ucctu.tu.org.

Photo credit: Winged Reel

RECONNECTING A COMMUNITY TO ITS RIVER

Diana Wilson wears her enthusiasm for her city on her sleeve. Get her talking about the city of Chattahoochee Hills and you will soon learn about her mission to reconnect this South Fulton community to the Chattahoochee River.

"People who have lived in this area for many years say that the water used to stink," Diana explains. "No one wanted to get near the river. All that has changed and the river is so much cleaner now."

The section of river that flows past Chattahoochee Hills is cleaner today than it has been for decades. The fishing is good, and water quality regularly meets U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards for swimming. With this resurgence in river health, hundreds of people have begun spending time on this section of river each year, and cities like Chattahoochee Hills are working to promote river access. "Public access to the river is especially needed in this area," says Diana. "Although our city borders the Chattahoochee River for 18 miles, we have no public access."

As Parks Commission Chair, Diana plays a big part championing Chattahoochee Hills' commitment to creating river access. In October, she organized a paddle trip with CRK and River Banks Adventures, bringing community members and city staff on the water. Diana also recently secured a commitment from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to establish a new boat ramp for residents, which will greatly increase opportunities to explore the Chattahoochee downstream of Atlanta. The new ramp will be built at Campbellton Park, in conjunction with the first part of a planned 25-mile water trail.

The return of communities like Chattahoochee Hills to the river is something to celebrate. Because of CRK's work, the Chattahoochee River downstream of Atlanta has become a place where people want to spend time and explore, and leaders like Diana Wilson are creating new opportunities to do just that.

"Public access to the river is especially needed in [Chattahoochee Hills]. Although our city borders the Chattahoochee River for 18 miles, we have no public access."

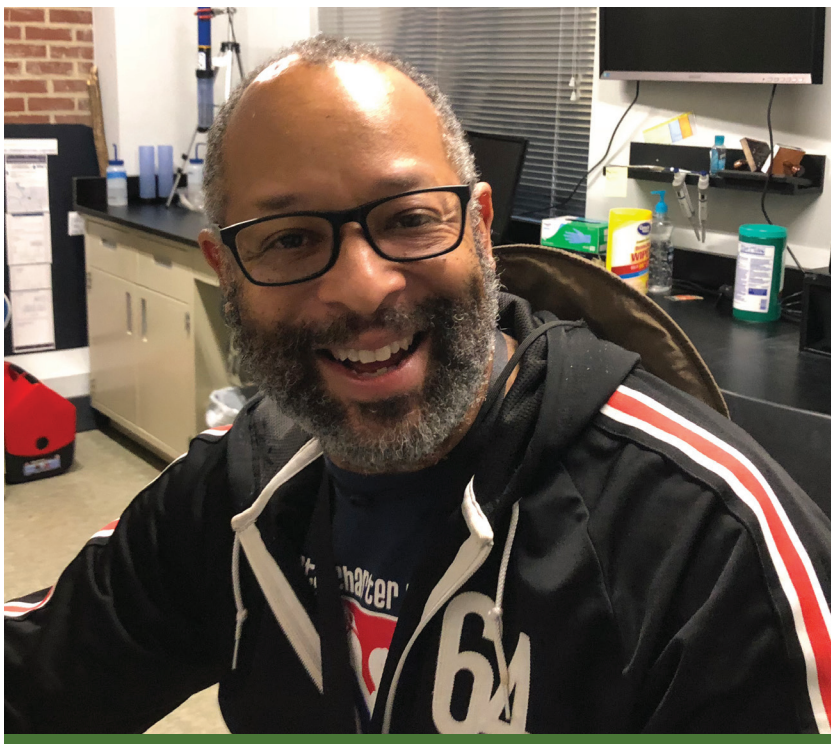
- Diana Wilson, *Parks Commission Chair for Chattahoochee Hills*

WELCOME ABOARD
BRYAN JENKINS!

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper welcomes our newest Board Member Bryan Patrick Jenkins, though he is no newbie to the CRK family.

Actively volunteering with Neighborhood Water Watch (NWW) since February 2016, Bryan has collected more than 200 water samples and helped identify multiple sewer spills in Sandy Creek, making a huge difference to the west Atlanta waterway.

As Vice-President of the Collier Heights Community Association and Co-Chairperson of the Friends of Jenny Drake Park Steering Committee, Bryan has worked tirelessly to protect and advocate for Sandy Creek. “I took to this thing and I absolutely enjoy sampling the water and bringing it back to know what’s in it.” Knowing what’s in the water has certainly helped CRK improve the waterway, but Brian has also been affected. “This has been a real important thing; I didn’t expect it to impact me in this way.”



“If we don’t protect the water, what are we leaving for our children and the generations to come?”

- Bryan Patrcik Jenkins, CRK Board Member and Volunteer

A Morehouse College alumnus with more than twenty years of academic, cable and broadcast television production experience, Bryan is a well-known and respected professional in the area of television production in the U.S. and abroad; working with such networks as BET, ESPN, VH-1, WSB-TV Atlanta, Fox television and Fox Sports. Currently General Manager of Clark Atlanta University’s Cable Access Television station (CAU-TV), he guides the overall vision of the channel and its link to academic classes that use the cable TV studio labs.

Even with all that going on, Bryan—now married with two lovely children—still finds time to collect water samples, attend community meetings, and is always willing to go the extra step to increase community awareness and address water quality concerns in west Atlanta and beyond. He understands what’s at stake, “If we don’t protect the water, what are we leaving for our children and the generations to come?” Welcome Brian, we are lucky to have you aboard!

DRAGONFLIES
DON'T JUST FLY

Visit a river or a stream on a sunny day and you will likely see numerous insects darting along the water’s surface. What you don’t see are the larvae and nymphs—baby insects—living on the river bottom, on logs resting in the water, and on roots embedded in the bank.

Rivers and streams are teeming with small insects that make up the base of the food web.

Dragonflies are one of the insects, and spend approximately one to two years living as a small brown bug in the water before they emerge and take flight in the air. They are also an “indicator species,” meaning that the health and number of these organisms can tell us a lot about water quality.

Photo courtesy of Georgia Adopt-a-Stream

“Aquatic invertebrates, especially dragonflies, are the food base for the trout. When water quality is good, the dragonflies thrive, and therefore, the trout thrive.”

-Chris Scalley, River Guide, *River Through Atlanta*

Most dragonfly species are sensitive to pollution—they need clear water in order to find food and lots of dissolved oxygen in the water to survive. You won’t find many of them in polluted urban streams, but they are abundant in the cool, clear water of the upper Chattahoochee and in the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, where CRK has worked to lower pollution levels for years.

They are also an important source of food for fish. Chris Scalley, a river guide with River Through Atlanta, spends hundreds of days each year fishing the waters of the Chattahoochee and knows the importance of larval aquatic insects. “Aquatic invertebrates, especially dragonflies, are the food base for the trout. When water quality is good, the dragonflies thrive, and therefore, the trout thrive.”

Dragonfly nymph (magnified view)

FILLING THE WATER GAP

In 2016, the metropolitan Atlanta region experienced a short, two-year drought. Normally, outdoor watering, regardless of drought conditions in Georgia, is only allowed before 10 a.m. and after 4 p.m. But the drought became so intense in 2016 that additional outdoor water use restrictions were implemented to make sure Lake Lanier and the Chattahoochee River could provide enough water for drinking, swimming and fishing should the drought intensify.

CRK's promotion of aggressive water conservation and efficiency has been a cornerstone of our advocacy. In 2011 and 2012, CRK produced *Filling the Water Gap: Conservation Successes and Missed Opportunities in Metro Atlanta* to outline local water conservation efforts within the region. CRK is pleased to announce a new edition of this report, highlighting eleven jurisdictions—cities, counties and water utilities—that rely on the Chattahoochee River basin's water.

"Water distribution efficiency can be put to work to address climate change and to cope with its effects."

- Paul Hawken, Editor, *Project Drawdown*

The report's goal is to present successes and opportunities to advance water conservation and efficiency in the Chattahoochee River basin and beyond. It is becoming increasingly important to address the impacts of climate change and adapt to prolonged drought conditions. Water conservation and efficiency are tools

that protect the natural and human environment, and will lead to a sustainable future. In a municipal context, comprehensive water conservation and efficiency programs can do more than encourage individuals to "think at the sink" when washing the dishes or brushing their teeth.

Paul Hawken said as a part of Project Drawdown, "water distribution efficiency can be put to work to address climate change and to cope with its effects." Successful water conservation and efficiency programs reduce the demand for the withdrawal, pumping, transmission and treatment of drinking water and wastewater. Each of those steps requires energy and has a carbon footprint.

By reducing water use and demand among all users, and increasing efficiencies in the system, we use less energy and generate less carbon. This can all have a positive effect on the Chattahoochee River system and beyond. Look for the new edition in Spring 2019.

LEGISLATIVE PREVIEW

Clean Water Is Not Free

You may be familiar with the saying "there's no such thing as a free lunch." The same applies for our clean water; if we want clean water, we have to work for it. As a member of the Georgia Water Coalition, CRK works with our partners under the Gold Dome to advocate in favor of laws that protect every person's right to fishable, drinkable and swimmable water—a practice we will continue into 2019.

Trust Fund Honesty

Under the Georgia Constitution, legislators can adopt laws creating fees to fund state programs.These collected fees are intended to fund a number of programs including hazardous site clean-ups and illegal tire dump clean-ups. Georgia has adopted a number of these fees, including, for example the Solid and Hazardous Waste Trust Funds. Since these funds were created in the early 90s, more than 40% of the collected funds, more than $200 million, have been diverted to pay for other portions of the state budget. The solution is a constitutional amendment that gives legislators the authority to transparently dedicate fee revenues while providing flexibility in the event of a downturn or recession.

Coal Ash

While Georgia Power is closing retired and unlined coal ash storage ponds, a loophole in Georgia law may soon change what happens to the ash. Beginning in July 2019, local governments will charge landfill operators $2.50 for every ton of household garbage collected, and only $1 per ton of coal ash. With some 8 million tons of coal ash to dispose of at local landfills, this translates into a potential $12 million windfall for Georgia Power. What's worse, the coal-ash loophole means that Georgia will continue to be a dumping ground for out-of-state coal ash. Legislators must close this loophole.

Buffer Protections

Following a 2015 Georgia Supreme Court decision that the General Assembly should clarify language in the Erosion and Sedimentation Control Act, which is used to identify and measure buffers on state waters, CRK and partners continue to pursue a legislative fix to correct this gap in buffer protections statewide.

The most powerful tool we have to pass these clean water protections is your voice. Please contact your state representatives to tell them that clean water is important to you. Learn more about these and other bills, and how to share this message at chattahoochee.org/our- work/legislature.

NEW TECHNOLOGY USED TO SLEUTH SOURCES OF BACTERIA IN THE CRNRA

How safe is it to swim, wade and boat in the Chattahoochee River today? For an urban river like the Chattahoochee, much of the answer depends on bacteria levels in the water.

BacteriAlert, the real-time bacteria monitoring program developed in partnership with CRK, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the National Parks Service (NPS), has been collecting data from the Chattahoochee River for 18 years. In that time, researchers have noticed a dependable pattern in the data—when it rains, bacteria levels rise. These spikes can put people that recreate in the river at risk of getting sick. The sampling only indicates if bacteria levels are high—what we don't know is the source.

For years, researchers assumed that the bacteria spikes originated from human sewage from leaking sewer lines and septic tanks. But could other factors be to blame? This question drove USGS scientist Dr. Anna Mckee to use a bacteria sleuthing technique called microbial sourcetracking (MST) to find out.

MST is a relatively new laboratory method that identifies DNA fragments of E. coli bacteria in a water sample that are specific to a source—such as humans, birds, dogs and deer—then measures how much of that bacteria is in the water sample. Having a better understanding of where bacteria pollution is coming from can help resource managers find and stop the pollution at its source and improve water quality overall.

"Preliminary results show that humans and dogs are both dominant contributors to E.coli in the river when it rains."

- Dr. Anna Mckee, Scientist, *United States Geological Survey*

Mckee collected river samples in the Chattahooochee River National Recreation Area (CRNRA) at West Paces Ferry, Medlock Bridge Road and Cochran Shoals, and in 11 tributaries that flow into the river during 2016 and 2017. She analyzed samples using the MST method, identifying DNA from humans, dogs and deer.

Her results are interesting, but not completely surprising. "Preliminary results show that humans and dogs are both dominant contributors to E.coli in the river when it rains," said McKee.

This result has interesting management implications. The human sewage detected by Mckee is likely coming from leaking sewer lines, which overflow when rainwater infiltrates into the sewer system. While the human bacteria pollution problem can be solved with repairs to infrastructure, the problem of dog poop must be addressed through public education and behavioral changes.

"People love to walk their dogs in the national park along the Chattahoochee River; however, far too many fail to properly dispose their dog's poop in a plastic bag and place it in a waste bin," said Sally Bethea, Board President of the Chattahoochee Parks Conservancy (CPC), the friends group for CRNRA, and founding director and Riverkeeper of CRK. "In response, CPC is working with the NPS to create a campaign to kick off in 2019. Our hope is that new messaging and branding around dog poop will help change behavior to protect our beloved national park and river."

Thanks to continuous monitoring by initiatives like BacteriAlert and enhanced detection methods such as MST, park managers may soon be able to ensure that as water levels get higher, bacteria levels stay at a healthy and safe level for river users.

"People love to walk their dogs in the national park along the Chattahoochee River; however, far too many fail to properly dispose their dog's poop in a plastic bag and place it in a waste bin."

- Sally Bethea, Board President, *Chattahoochee Parks Conservancy*

Above: CRK interns collect water samples to measure E.coli levels throughout the Chattahoochee watershed.

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24TH PATRON DINNER BREAKS RECORDS

On September 26, 2018, we held our 24th Annual Patron Dinner at the Georgia Aquarium. The event was an outstanding success thanks to the 500 guests and sponsors who joined us to celebrate our beloved Chattahoochee River and esteemed honorees.

Together, we raised more than $320,000 for our river protection efforts.
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