



CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVERKEEPER

CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF STEWARDSHIP

from the mountains to the sea.

The Chattahoochee River is the lifeblood of our region. Our river is the source of drinking water for more than five million people.

From the late 1970s through the 1990s, the City of Atlanta failed to invest in maintenance of the city's storm and sewer system, allowing thousands of overflows and spills of untreated sewage to contaminate the river, its tributaries and community water supplies. This negligence affected tributaries in the metro Atlanta area and the river all the way to West Point Lake.

Degraded water quality threatened public health and lowered downstream property values. Community members concerned about the never-ending flow of trash and pollution organized in 1994 as Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, now Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (CRK) to protect the river that sustained them and their children.

Our successes result in cleaner water, protect and improve the health of people, fish and wildlife, and support the economic prosperity of the region.

Over the next 25 years, thousands of donors invested a total of \$28 million toward our mission to restore the river system. Under the leadership of the Board of Directors and staff, along with the help of thousands of members and volunteers, CRK has led a transformation of our most critical resource—the Chattahoochee River, which is the lifeblood of the region and source of drinking water for more than five million people. The Chattahoochee River connects us to our past and to our future, to our neighbors up and downstream, and to the natural world of fish and wildlife.

In honor of this milestone, we have compiled a record of our most significant accomplishments. In doing so we found that our actions resulted in at least \$2.2 billion invested to improve our river. These expenditures came from government agencies, developers and regulated industries, either to compensate for failures to adhere to environmental laws and regulations or as efforts to remediate and protect our waterways. In sum, every \$1 donated to CRK has yielded at least \$80 in benefits to the Chattahoochee River watershed and its people.

Today, our river is viewed in a whole new light—as an amenity rather than a drainage ditch for sewage. Our successes result in cleaner water, protect and improve the health of people, fish and wildlife, and support the economic prosperity of the region. From reducing sewage spills to educating the next generation of river stewards, our record of success is too long to detail here. These ten triumphs shed light on the impact CRK has had on our river and its communities, and why **we will remain dedicated to our mission for years to come.**



Juliet

Juliet Cohen, Executive Director

JASON

Jason Ulseth, Riverkeeper



Thousands of donors like you donated this much to help Chattahoochee Riverkeeper in our mission:

\$28 million



With your help, CRK's work resulted in at least this much invested to improve the Chattahoochee River:

\$2.2 billion



In the past 25 years, we've transformed every dollar you donated to CRK into \$80 of benefits to our river.

\$1 = \$80 in benefits

Thank you.

1 | Filed legal action against City of Atlanta to secure healthier river downstream

For years, the City of Atlanta overlooked failing sewage and stormwater collection and treatment systems, resulting in frequent overflows of raw sewage directly into our waterways. CRK and downstream municipalities filed a lawsuit against the city in 1995 to force officials to reduce spills by repairing and upgrading aging infrastructure it had long neglected.



Today, average bacteria levels in the Chattahoochee River are 80% lower than levels measured three decades ago.

Following a \$2.06 billion investment to overhaul the city's storm and sewer system, average bacteria levels in the river are now 80% lower than levels measured three decades ago. Shirley Franklin, former mayor of Atlanta, said "those investments have yielded nearly \$18 billion in new public and private investment." Relatedly, the volume of sewage spills within Atlanta was reduced by 99%.

Beyond the direct investments in city infrastructure, CRK's legal settlement resulted in the Greenway Acquisition Program, through which the city purchased 1,887 acres in 189 parcels for green space. CRK's legal settlement also prompted the removal of trash along 37 miles of tributaries and funded long-term stream monitoring by the U.S. Geological Survey, which continues to provide valuable data to assess current water quality and forecast potential changes to the river.



Watch



River Revived: Middle Chattahoochee
vimeo.com/crkeeper/riverrevived

2 | Created volunteer water sampling program, achieved record results

Neighborhood Water Watch (NWW), developed by CRK in 2010, is a volunteer-based water protection program where we work with individuals and partner organizations to measure and improve water quality in urban streams. Through NWW, we train and support people to collect water samples from local creeks and bring them to one of our three state-of-the-art laboratories. There, water samples are analyzed for bacteria and other pollutants while adhering to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards. Any threats indicated are tracked and reported to protect public health and restore our public waterways.

Today, NWW is engaging 117 volunteers and partners who are collecting weekly water samples at 180 stations along urban creeks and the river. Since 2010, we have collected more than 25,000 water samples, conducted more than 500 investigations of pollution sources, and found and addressed 80 sewer spills. With the help of hundreds of volunteers and interns, we have stopped millions of gallons of raw sewage from contaminating our public waterways. This program is nationally recognized as a premier model for community-based water protection. CRK provides guidance, training and materials for other organizations that wish to replicate NWW in their watersheds.

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Watch



Neighborhood Water Watch
[vimeo.com/crkeeper/
neighborhoodwaterwatch](https://vimeo.com/crkeeper/neighborhoodwaterwatch)

3 | Secured investment of more than \$27 million to stop stormwater pollution

Today, the greatest threat to the river, its lakes and tributaries is stormwater runoff. CRK has conducted more than 1,200 investigations of construction and industrial facilities to ensure compliance with best management practices and clean water laws. This field experience, combined with our participation in many state-convened stakeholder groups that review regulations, led CRK to develop “Get the Dirt Out” and “Protecting Streams and Communities from Industrial Pollution,” two core programs with dedicated staff, training materials and seminars.

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Our actions also resulted in a \$10 million judgment—the largest civil penalty ever ordered in this type of case in Georgia—levied against an asphalt manufacturer for unlawful discharge of toxic pollutants into the Chattahoochee River. Through these and many other stormwater control initiatives, we have caused or negotiated more than \$27 million in investments by developers, property owners, industrial facilities and government agencies to stop stormwater pollution.



Watch



American Sealcoat
[vimeo.com/crkeeper/
americansealcoat](https://vimeo.com/crkeeper/americansealcoat)



4 | Provided water safety data to 50 million national park visitors

In 2001, a collaboration between CRK, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey created a water monitoring program whose purpose is to ensure healthy water in the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, a 48-mile river park managed by the National Park Service. Still in operation today, BacteriALERT is the longest running private-public monitoring program in the state. This water safety data has been made available to 50 million park visitors since the program's inception. Nearly \$2 million has been invested in this program, including funds from CRK. Building on our success, the BacteriALERT program recently expanded to include regular monitoring at three stations along the river park and has been used as the proving ground for new laboratory methods to advance science in water quality testing.

BacteriALERT is the longest running private-public water monitoring program in the state.



Visit

Our Work: Water Quality Monitoring
chattahoochee.org/our-work/water-quality-monitoring

5

Data collected by CRK triggered needed cleanup plan for Lake Lanier



Lake Lanier supplies drinking water for more than five million people. It also boasts \$5 billion in economic impact to the region with 10 million visitors annually. In 2008, CRK's water quality monitoring on the lake revealed excess nutrient pollution that demanded a cleanup plan be developed. After years of planning, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has finalized a plan that requires stronger permits for wastewater discharges into Lake Lanier.

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The agency has also imposed new measures to control stormwater runoff, which will prevent 70 tons of algae producing phosphorous from flowing into the lake every year. While these new regulations will require an initial investment of more than \$5 million, their impact has the potential to keep Lake Lanier clean for decades to come.

Watch



Lake Lanier Water Monitoring
[vimeo.com/crkeeper/
lakelanierwatermonitoring](https://vimeo.com/crkeeper/lakelanierwatermonitoring)

6 | Removed two million pounds of trash from the watershed

Our initial lawsuit against the City of Atlanta resulted in 568 tons of trash being removed from 37 miles of tributaries, but we knew that was just the beginning. In recent years, we have averaged removal of 30 tons of trash annually from the Chattahoochee River watershed. In total, since 1994, CRK with our partners, sponsors and dedicated volunteers, has removed more than two million pounds of trash—equal to 25 full 18-wheeler tractor trailers.

Trash in our watershed is a serious problem that affects the health of people, wildlife and our economy. From roadside drainage ditches or almost anywhere on land, litter easily makes its way into our creeks, river and lakes through stormwater runoff, before eventually reaching our oceans and our global food supply. Conservation-minded companies like The Coca Cola Company, Colonial Pipeline, Cox Enterprises/Cox Conserves, The Home Depot, The Orvis Company, Porsche North America, SweetWater Brewing Company, UPS, and others, along with hundreds of community partners and volunteers every year, lend their support, time and energy to remove trash and recycle refuse with CRK.

CRK, our partners, sponsors, and dedicated volunteers have removed more than two million pounds of trash—equal to 25 full 18-wheeler tractor trailers.



Watch



WSB-TV Chattahoochee River Cleanup
<https://2wsb.tv/2SC5RL8>

7 | Educated 70,000+ students and teachers aboard our floating classrooms

In 2000, CRK and Elachee Nature Science Center partnered to launch Georgia’s first floating classroom on Lake Lanier. The floating classroom takes students out of the traditional classroom setting and onto the water, where students participate in hands-on activities that emphasize STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) concepts and are tied to age-appropriate Georgia Standards for Excellence. In 2015, CRK built a second floating classroom on West Point Lake.

Each year, CRK seeks grants and donations to fund scholarships that allow underserved students to come aboard without fear of financial limits. As a result, more than 70,000 teachers and students from every corner of the Chattahoochee watershed have taken part in this impactful program.

“It’s an experience like this that opens doors for 21st century problem solvers and future scientists.”

- Dawn Smith, K-5 Science Curriculum Director,
Muscogee County School District

From water quality testing to identifying freshwater plankton and wildlife, experiences aboard the floating classrooms allow students to learn first-hand how the lake is connected to the drinking water that flows from their faucets. They also gain insight into how they can protect these precious water resources. These experiences give students from elementary through high school the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of and a deeper connection to the water that is so important to our lives—all while having fun.



Watch



2018: Fund the Need
[vimeo.com/crkeeper/
fundtheneed2018](https://vimeo.com/crkeeper/fundtheneed2018)

8 | CRK is a founding force in Georgia's state-wide water protection movement

In 2002, CRK was one of four founding organizations to form the Georgia Water Coalition, an alliance of community and professional organizations working together to protect and care for Georgia's water resources. Today, there are 258 members state-wide representing more than 250,000 Georgians. The coalition produces two annual reports, the *Dirty Dozen* and the *Clean 13*, highlighting the worst offenses to Georgia's water resources as well as recognizing leaders for their stewardship of the state's waters.

CRK has led the Georgia Water Coalition's legislative program to many wins at the State Capitol, including:

- A defeat of water permit trading;
- Advocating for a statewide water plan recognizing that water is a resource for the public;
- Encouraging restrictions on the permitting of unnecessary new reservoirs;
- Successfully defeating multiple attempts to weaken stream buffer laws;
- Providing support for the state emergency response program;
- Fighting for increased government transparency;
- And more!

Visit

Our Work: Legislative Work

chattahoochee.org/our-work/legislative-work



Photo Credit: Erik Voss

9 | Protected thousands of acres and miles of streams from development

Green spaces along streams provide countless benefits to the environment and our health; these undisturbed lands along waterways filter pollutants, provide shade and lower temperatures, absorb stormwater to reduce flooding, replenish groundwater stores needed in times of drought, and reduce erosion of soil into our waterways. Through regulatory processes, legal actions and other means, CRK successfully secured the protection of nearly 1,950 acres of land and at least 130 miles of stream banks.

We also helped defeat the construction of two amenity reservoirs—Glades in Hall County and Bear Creek in Fulton County. These two boondoggle projects would have burdened taxpayers with an unnecessary \$200+ million, and our efforts to stop them ensured that another 1,300 acres of land and 25 miles of streams would not be permanently flooded.

Through regulatory processes, legal actions and other means, CRK successfully secured the protection of nearly 1,950 acres of land and at least 130 miles of stream banks.



Visit

Our Work: Enforcement
chattahoochee.org/our-work/enforcement



10 | Helped more than 5,000 people resolve water-related problems

Every day concerned people, businesses and government agencies rely on our Hotline to report water-related problems in the Chattahoochee River watershed. During our 25 years, qualified CRK staff members have handled more than 5,000 of these calls reporting everything from muddy water flowing from construction sites to dead fish in the water, illegal trash dumps, and reeking sewer spills. Whether by land, air or water, CRK inspects problem sites, tests water quality, reports issues to local governments, and/or brings our own enforcement action to ensure pollution problems in our watershed are resolved.



Call or Visit

To report a problem
chattahoochee.org/report-a-problem
(404) 352-9828



The Chattahoochee River is facing great challenges as are many special places around the planet. Today, more than five million people rely on our river for drinking water, but population and development will continue to grow placing more stress on this limited resource. After all, the headwaters of the Chattahoochee comprise the smallest watershed for any major metropolitan area in the country.



Over the past 25 years, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper has engaged a green army of diverse and dedicated members, volunteers, staff and Board of Directors in the restoration and stewardship of our precious river. Not only have we made tremendous improvement in the health of the river, we have also been recognized as an excellent steward of donor dollars. Charity Navigator has awarded CRK its highest rating (4-stars) for eleven consecutive years, and in 2018, CRK was named in a list of “30 Charities That Won’t Waste Your Money” by MSN.com The Street.

We are proud of what we have accomplished, but now we must work together to grow this movement to protect the river, which makes up 60% of our bodies, and to keep her healthy for the next generations.

Laura Turner Seydel and **Rutherford Seydel**, *Chair, and CRK Co-Founders*



You wonder what The Chattahoochee River would be like today if there had been no Chattahoochee Riverkeeper?! There are so many forces tugging on this incredible resource and CRK has unwaveringly served as The River’s advocate and protector since 1994. To the past, present and future leaders and volunteers of CRK, a Big Thank you and Congratulations on the 25th anniversary! The Chattahoochee River is thriving today but the challenges remain diverse and constant. Let’s keep fighting for The River!

Dave Kirkpatrick, *Vice Chair, Board of Directors*



Chattahoochee Riverkeeper’s mission is to advocate and secure the protection and stewardship of the Chattahoochee River, its lakes, tributaries and watershed, in order to restore and preserve their ecological health for the people and wildlife that depend on the river system.

Get Involved

Become a member



Volunteer



Attend our events



Follow us



Facebook: @chattahoocheeriverkeeper



Twitter: @crkeeper



Instagram: @crkeeper



LinkedIn: Chattahoochee Riverkeeper

Donate to support our program work



Take part in our Silver Anniversary celebrations by attending these events in 2019:



Sweep the Hooch, Apr. 6
chattahoochee.org/sweep-the-hooch



Chattahoochee Valley River Rally, May 4
chattahoochee.org/cvrr



Wild & Scenic Film Festival, May 11
chattahoochee.org/wildscenic



Down the Hatch Film Festival, Sept. 29
chattahoochee.org/dth



Water Warriors Summit, Oct. 13-14
chattahoochee.org/water-warriors-youth-summit



25th Annual Patron Dinner, Oct. 24
chattahoochee.org/patrodinner



Member Celebration, Nov.
chattahoochee.org/member-celebration



Relay Down the Hooch, 2019
Follow our 435-mile long, Olympic torch-style relay from the mountains to the sea.
chattahoochee.org/relay

