CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVERKEEPER®

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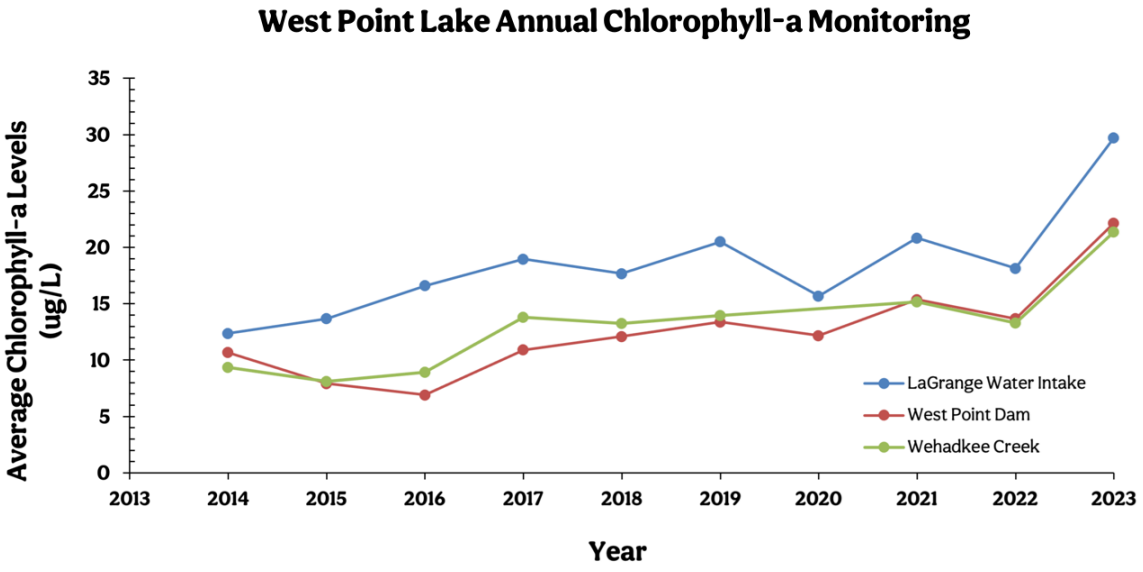
West Point Lake Exceeds Chlorophyll-a Standards in 2023

[LaGrange, Georgia] – In 2023, West Point Lake saw its highest recorded levels of chlorophyll-a, an indicator of the amount of algae in the water, for the first time in more than a decade.

Chlorophyll-a, a pigment in algae, is an important measure of the lake's overall environmental health. Excess algae in the water can negatively affect lake water quality, impact the taste and smell of drinking water after treatment, and cause decreases in the oxygen that fish and other aquatic life need to survive. Some algae species may even threaten the health of humans and animals who come in contact with the contaminated water.

2023 is the first year that algae levels in West Point Lake have exceeded standards set by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) in 2013. If annual chlorophyll-a levels in the lake exceed the standard twice in a five-year period, it will trigger a state-required cleanup plan called a "Total Maximum Daily Load."

After working throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s to hold the City of Atlanta accountable for major sewer issues that negatively affected West Point Lake, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (CRK) began monitoring chlorophyll-a levels on West Point Lake in 2014. Thanks to the support of the City of LaGrange and individual donors, CRK staff collect monthly samples at three stations on West Point Lake between April and October every year in accordance with a Sampling and Quality Assurance Plan approved by EPD. At the end of the season, data collected by CRK are averaged with data collected by EPD.



Results show that the amount of algae in the lake has slowly increased since 2014, but algae levels made a significant jump this past year. For example, at the City of LaGrange water intake station on West Point Lake, levels increased from 18 ug/L in 2022 to almost 30 ug/L in 2023. The standard set by EPD for that station is 24 ug/L.

Because of its location on the Chattahoochee River downstream of Metro Atlanta, West Point Lake inadvertently acts as a net for sediment from development, nutrients from lawns, polluted runoff from industrial facilities, and leaking wastewater pipes. The situation is much better than it was – water quality data collected on the Chattahoochee River upstream of West Point Lake indicates an 80% reduction in bacteria levels compared to results from two decades ago. But there is more work that needs to be done to protect the lake.

“The combined effects of nutrients and warmer temperatures pose a significant challenge to keeping West Point Lake healthy and safe,” notes Jason Ulseth, CRK Executive Director and Riverkeeper.

Surrounding communities depend on West Point Lake for water supply, flood protection, and recreation. CRK encourages residents and visitors to remain informed and involved in preserving the lake's ecosystem by adopting responsible practices that safeguard water quality. To learn more about our work and the effects of harmful algae blooms, visit: https://chattahoochee.org/our-work/habs/

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About Chattahoochee Riverkeeper
Our mission is to educate, advocate, and secure the protection and stewardship of the Chattahoochee River, including its lakes, tributaries, and watershed, in order to restore and conserve their ecological health for the people and wildlife that depend on the river system and in recognition of the important ecosystem functions provided throughout the region and planet.

For more information, visit www.chattahoochee.org.

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