



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Another wastewater treatment plant fails, threatens public health

Atlanta, GA – Dangerously high levels of E. coli bacteria have been detected in the Chattahoochee River in metropolitan Atlanta and immediately downstream of the Marietta Boulevard/Atlanta Road bridge. Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (CRK) detected high levels of bacteria during routine river monitoring and tracked the source to the City of Atlanta’s R.M. Clayton Water Reclamation Center (WRC).

Water samples collected daily by CRK from the R.M. Clayton WRC outfall at the Chattahoochee River between March 4 and March 13 showed E. coli levels an average of 340 times higher than the amount recommended by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for [safe water recreation](#).

R.M. Clayton WRC is responsible for treating a large volume of the City of Atlanta’s sewage before it is discharged to the Chattahoochee River. The facility has a National Pollutant Discharge and Elimination System (NPDES) permit to discharge 100 million gallons per day of treated wastewater to the Chattahoochee River. Independent testing by CRK indicates the ongoing discharge of pollution from R.M. Clayton WRC is a violation of the Clean Water Act and CRK has reported it to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD).



CRK staff member collects a water sample from the R.M. Clayton WRC outfall on March 13, 2024.

“Water quality is generally very good in metro Atlanta and in the Chattahoochee River,” says Jason Ulseth, CRK’s Riverkeeper and executive director, “but this major malfunction is creating unsafe and unhealthy conditions immediately downstream of the region’s largest wastewater treatment plant.”

High bacteria levels pose serious risks to public health, especially for vulnerable populations such as young children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems. CRK recommends that river users avoid recreation on the river immediately downstream of the Marietta Boulevard/Atlanta Road bridge at this time. It remains safe to recreate upstream of Atlanta Road and in the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area.

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper is monitoring the impact of the discharge on wildlife at the R.M. Clayton WRC outfall and downstream. As of March 13, there have been no indications of a fish kill as a result of the discharge. Drinking water in Fulton County and the metro Atlanta region is not affected by the plant failure.

This is the second failure at a major wastewater treatment plant in metro Atlanta in less than a year. In the summer of 2023, a failure at the Big Creek Water Reclamation Facility in Fulton County sent more than 20 million gallons of undertreated sewage per day into the river upstream of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, resulting in a three-week closure of the river park to protect public health.

“Trust for Public Land is grateful for Chattahoochee Riverkeeper’s ongoing efforts to protect the Chattahoochee,” says George Dusenbury, Vice President Southern Region and the Georgia State Director at Trust for Public Land. “Our ongoing efforts to reconnect the region to its river depends on the Chattahoochee being clean, safe, and welcoming.”

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper will continue daily water testing at R.M. Clayton WRC and downstream until the issue is resolved. CRK also conducts weekly water quality testing at sites throughout the Chattahoochee River watershed; these results may be viewed on our [website](#).

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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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