



# CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVERKEEPER®

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Chattahoochee Riverkeeper joins state lawsuit against Phenix City for violating Clean Water Act**

PHENIX CITY, AL – Chattahoochee Riverkeeper has joined a state lawsuit against Phenix City for violations of the Clean Water Act and the Alabama Water Pollution Control Act.

In July 2024, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (CRK) sent a letter notifying the Phenix City Department of Public Utilities that they would have 60 days to stop discharging illegal levels of pollution into the Chattahoochee River from the Phenix City Wastewater Treatment Plant or the group would file a lawsuit in federal court.

On the 59<sup>th</sup> day, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) filed a state lawsuit that superseded CRK's plan to file a federal lawsuit. With the support of our partners at the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC), CRK made a motion to intervene in the state lawsuit; this motion was granted by Russell County Circuit Judge David Johnson on March 31, 2025.

In Alabama, the Phenix City Wastewater Treatment Plant is permitted to release up to six million gallons of treated wastewater into the Chattahoochee River per day. In 2023, CRK started receiving reports of foamy discharge with a strong odor and sanitary items in the Chattahoochee River near the plant's outfall pipe into the river.

Frequent testing conducted by CRK has confirmed multiple spikes in bacteria levels at the plant's outfall that have exceeded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's recommendations for safe water recreation. Public records confirm that the plant has also regularly violated pollution limits since 2020.

Additionally, Phenix City's outdated wastewater collection system suffers from repeated and ongoing failures. Data from the Alabama Department of Environmental Management show that sanitary sewer overflows have occurred regularly in Phenix City since at least 2021, including an overflow of approximately two million gallons of raw sewage from the plant into the river in February of 2024.

CRK recommends that recreators exercise caution on the river immediately downstream of the plant's outfall located off State Docks Road in Alabama. When the risk of harmful bacteria exposure is high, recreators should wash their hands after contacting the water, avoid fully submerging underwater, and use particular caution if young, elderly, or immunocompromised.

"Phenix City is one of several failing wastewater treatment plants in the Chattahoochee River Basin," says Jason Ulseth, CRK's Riverkeeper and Executive Director. "CRK will hold Phenix City and others accountable to ensure that necessary infrastructure upgrades are made to protect water quality and all of us who depend on the Chattahoochee River for drinking water, fishing and recreation."

"Chattahoochee Riverkeeper shined a light on the ongoing pollution by Phenix City, and they deserve a voice in the process of fixing these problems," said Barry Brock, a senior attorney and director of SELC's Alabama office. "Phenix City and downstream communities don't deserve a river polluted with unsafe levels of bacteria and potentially dangerous waste."

CRK has joined the state lawsuit to ensure that Phenix City creates meaningful and permanent solutions to its ongoing water treatment failures.

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**About Chattahoochee Riverkeeper:**

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper's 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](http://www.chattahoochee.org).

**About Southern Environmental Law Center:**

The Southern Environmental Law Center is one of the nation's most powerful defenders of the environment, rooted in the South. With a long track record, SELC takes on the toughest environmental challenges in court, in government, and in our communities to protect our region's air, water, climate, wildlife, lands, and people. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, the organization has a staff of 200, including more than 130 legal and policy experts, and is headquartered in Charlottesville, Va., with offices in Asheville, Atlanta, Birmingham, Chapel Hill, Charleston, Nashville, Richmond, and Washington, D.C. [selc.org](http://selc.org)