



## A WIN FOR THE RIVER: CRK, ATLANTA REACH SETTLEMENT

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (CRK) and the City of Atlanta have reached a settlement agreement regarding a Clean Water Act lawsuit filed by CRK and the Southern Environmental Law Center in 2024. The lawsuit concerned pollution from R.M. Clayton, the City's largest wastewater treatment

facility, which releases millions of gallons of treated wastewater into the Chattahoochee River every day. Thanks to the City's leadership and investments in the facility, R.M. Clayton is no longer polluting the Chattahoochee River. [Read more on page 8.](#)

2024 The facility has ten secondary clarifiers, or large settling tanks used to separate sludge from treated wastewater. At one point, only two of the clarifiers were operational.



2026 Today, all ten secondary clarifiers are repaired and free of sludge or algae.



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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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 2 RIVERCHAT

## REFLECTIONS: SECURING THE FUTURE OF OUR RIVER

Think about how much water you use every day. Where does it come from, and where does it all go?

If you're one of the millions of people like me, your tap water is drawn from the Chattahoochee River, treated, and sent to you through a network of pipes. If you're on a sewer system, the water you send down the drain flows to a wastewater treatment plant where it is cleaned and returned to the river it came from.

Water quality in the Chattahoochee today is generally very good, but that wasn't always the case. From the 1970s through 1990s, the City of Atlanta failed to invest in the maintenance of its sewer system, causing frequent, devastating sewage spills into the river and its tributaries.

Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (now CRK) filed our first lawsuit against Atlanta in 1995. When we settled our case in 1997, a consent decree was put in place to overhaul the entire sewage system. In the past 30 years, the City made more than \$2 billion in investments

that made the river cleaner than it had been in decades – safe for people to paddle, fish, and splash around in.

But infrastructure falls apart without maintenance. In recent years, CRK has uncovered multiple wastewater treatment plant failures in different parts of the river basin, including Atlanta. In each case, leaders waited until it was too late to invest in upgrades and repairs to their facilities.

As a nonprofit watchdog, CRK carries out our mission by building partnerships with leaders and stakeholders. Our most recent legal settlement with the City of Atlanta (see page 8) is proof that we can secure the future of our river by working together. It takes all of us – public servants, community leaders, and everyday people who love the river – to protect our waterways now and for generations to come.



**JASON ULSETH**

Riverkeeper & Executive Director

## FACES OF THE CHATTAHOOCHEE: DESTINEE WHITAKER

After moving from Philadelphia in 2019 to study environmental science at Spelman College, Destinee Whitaker quickly immersed herself in Atlanta's river community. As a researcher with West Atlanta Watershed Alliance and CRK's Neighborhood Water Watch intern, she covered everything from meticulous lab work to tromping fearlessly through muggy, insect-riddled creeks. The work, she says, "deepened my passion for urban waterways in ways I never anticipated. It pushed my learning beyond the classroom and laboratory; seeing the tangible impact made the work feel more purposeful." She's now pursuing



a Master's in Geoscience with a Water Science Concentration at Georgia State University. Thanks Destinee; we need more people out there with your spirit!

**"Don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone and build a deeper relationship with the environment around you, especially in the places where you live and work." – Destinee Whitaker**

CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVERKEEPER

# ON PATROL WITH CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVERKEEPER



## SEDIMENT POLLUTION ON LAKE LANIER

Calls from neighbors alerted CRK to sediment issues from a 116-acre construction site right on the banks of Lake Lanier. Our initial examination found that sediment storage on the site was woefully inadequate. After one rain, dirt that washed from the site into an adjacent cove reduced visibility in the water to one-third of the depth of visibility in a nearby unimpacted cove. CRK alerted the City of Gainesville and the developer, resulting in a site visit with all parties. The developer made significant modifications to the erosion and sedimentation plan, and CRK continues to monitor the site for impacts to the lake.



## COMMUNITY WATER MONITORING AT WORK

A dedicated volunteer helped stop a sewer leak in Fulton County! Every month, Mark Dessommes with the Upper Chattahoochee Chapter of Trout Unlimited conducts testing for Georgia Adopt-A-Stream at the site where Johns Creek flows under Old Alabama Road. After Mark reported unusually high levels of E. coli bacteria in the creek, CRK's Neighborhood Water Watch team tracked the source to a broken sewer line. Fulton County estimated the spill to be around 1,000 gallons of sewage per hour. The county replaced the sewer line and manhole to prevent further pollution to the creek and the Chattahoochee River.

## TRACKING EPA CLEANUP EFFORTS

Thanks to a Hotline report from a concerned citizen, a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-led cleanup is underway at an abandoned oil storage and waste recycling facility in Russell County, Alabama. The site, located about 300 feet from the Chattahoochee River, contained 3.6 million gallons of oil, wastewater, and sludge in 15 tanks. In November 2025, drone imagery revealed a leaking black substance around the tanks, which CRK reported to the state and EPA. Although federal funding has delayed progress, EPA expects the remaining 600,000 gallons to be removed by the end of 2026. CRK will continue monitoring to help protect the environment and public health.



## CITY OF WEST POINT SEWAGE OVERFLOW

On January 8, 2026, CRK staff responded to a hotline report about a sewage overflow on an unnamed tributary to Long Cane Creek in West Point, Georgia. The overflow was reported to West Point utilities, who found an overflowing manhole and determined the cause to be an electrical malfunction of an adjacent lift station. The lift station was repaired, and the overflow was cleaned and sanitized. CRK staff will continue to monitor the area as needed.



[> LEARN MORE ABOUT ENFORCEMENT](#)

Mexico

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS by the NUMBERS 2025

## TRASH-FREE CHATTAHOOCHEE

**2,512**  
CLEANUP  
VOLUNTEERS

**4,925**  
Pounds of trash and  
recyclables collected  
by trash traps

**NEW RECORD!**  
**73** TONS OF  
TRASH  
AND RECYCLABLES  
REMOVED BY  
VOLUNTEERS

**40**  
Volunteer  
cleanup events

**17** In-stream  
trash traps  
in operation



## WATER MONITORING AND CONSERVATION

**6,823**  
Neighborhood  
Water Watch  
(NWW) samples  
collected and tested  
weekly for bacteria

**177** NWW  
VOLUNTEERS  
AND PARTNERS

**19** SEWER SPILLS  
FOUND AND  
STOPPED BY NWW

**NEW PROGRAM!**  
**15** SUMMER  
SWIM  
GUIDES  
PUBLISHED

**306**  
NWW SITES  
TESTED WEEKLY



[> VIEW MORE ACCOMPLISHMENTS](#)

4 RIVERCHAT



## ADVOCACY

**598**  
Advocates wrote  
messages to  
Congressional  
representatives and US  
Senators as a result of  
2 CRK action alerts

**29**  
Permit comment letters  
and testimonials before  
government agencies to  
maintain and advance  
environmental laws

**2**  
ACTIVE  
CLEAN WATER  
ACT LAWSUITS

## EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

**1,438**  
NEW MEMBERS

**5,084** Floating  
classroom scholarships  
provided to students  
from Title I schools

**65**  
Youth participants  
learned the importance  
of water conservation  
at the Becca Sue Klein  
All Kids Fish events

# 31ST ANNUAL PATRON DINNER

On September 19, 2025, CRK supporters and friends gathered for our 31st Annual Patron Dinner, this year themed “Beyond the Horizon.” The evening began with a fun cocktail hour in the Atlanta History Center’s atrium where guests viewed the museum’s main exhibit along with our array of silent auction items. We continued with our seated dinner and program in the ballroom, where we honored sister nonprofit Paddle4Tomorrow and major corporate funder J.M. Huber Corporation. Jason Ulseth presented his annual State of the River speech and our Fund the Future paddle raise highlighted our youth engagement and education programs. The night ended with a dessert afterparty on the History Center’s terraces with coffee served in custom cups donated by Reduce. Thanks to the generosity of those who attended in person and participated in the silent auction and raffle online, the 31st Annual Patron Dinner raised more than \$325,000 to sustain CRK’s programs. We’re grateful to all who contributed to the celebration as we continue looking beyond the horizon toward the river’s future and the young people who will champion it.

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CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVERKEEPER

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FOR HELPING US KEEP WATCH OVER OUR WATERS!

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 \*Ashley Freeze  
 Margaret Gaines  
 June Garber  
 David Gell  
 Bruno Giri  
 Bobby Goldstein  
 Mary and Frank Gordon  
 Evan Graham  
 Adam Greenwood  
 Abby Grozine  
 Shawn Gunther  
 Stuart Gulley  
 Lori Hamilton  
 Wesley Hamm  
 Ellie Hankin  
 Kathleen and Barry Hanna  
 Scott Hansard  
 Christine and Alex Hassell  
 \*Michael Hastings  
 \*Carol Hayes  
 Xin and Yuanwei He  
 \*Michael Hellerstein  
 Emily Hennessee  
 Mike and Brandi Herson  
 \*Lesley High  
 Adina and Patrick Hilton  
 Margaret Hobson  
 David Hodges  
 Juliet Hollyhurst  
 Geninia Honore  
 Laura Hopkins  
 Barry Horton  
 Shae Hoschek  
 George Howard  
 Kaydee Hoyt  
 Amy Hrebenak  
 Paul Hudson  
 Gaby Ivie  
 Chloe Rhea Beauford and  
 David Iwaniec  
 Seva Iwinski Bray  
 \*Alicia and Hal Jacobs  
 Phil Jacobs  
 \*Moshe Jacobson  
 Deayne Johnson  
 Jeanne and Stephen Johnson

Tom H. Johnson Jr.  
 Heather Jones  
 Alexander Jordan  
 Betyln Justice  
 Semra and Kemal Karakoc  
 Alexia Kartis  
 Tshiamala Katala  
 Laura Kearns  
 Tammy Keaton  
 Gloria and Dean Keegan  
 David Keys  
 Jawad Khan  
 Jack Killorin  
 \*Ally Kimpling  
 Bob Kinnett  
 Gillespie Kirkland  
 Harriet and Kip Kirkpatrick  
 Sabrina and Hank Klausman  
 Isabelle and Charles Knight  
 Joy Kramer  
 Susan Kreft  
 Art Kunberger  
 Richard Ladner  
 Linda Lanier  
 Evelyn Larson  
 John Lavelle  
 Judy Lawrence  
 Eric Leiserson  
 Sarah Lesar  
 Nathan LeSueur  
 Annie Lin  
 Joshua Little  
 Patti and Simon Locke  
 Lockheed Martin  
 Aeronautical Systems  
 Chris Lott  
 \*Jen Loutzenheiser  
 Adrienne Love  
 Daniel Loventhal  
 Daniel Lowe  
 Mark Lown  
 \*Maria and Gary Ludi  
 Quin'darius Lyles-Woods  
 Michael Lynch  
 Dave Lynton  
 Devadas Lynton  
 Dena Maguire Young and  
 David Young  
 Joseph Mani  
 Peter Martin  
 Lenin Martinez  
 Geoff Massey  
 Sandra and George Maule  
 Wendee and Ben Maxwell  
 Bill Maxwell  
 Andrea McDermott  
 Bill McGoldrick  
 Peter McHale  
 Debbie McKeivitt  
 Debbie and Jerry McKeivitt  
 \*Valerie McMullian  
 Hannah Meltzer  
 Ruth and Larry Menter  
 JoAnn and Ken Meyer  
 Walter Miller  
 Amy Millican  
 Roger Moister Jr.  
 Temple Moore  
 \*Bradley Moore  
 James Morgens  
 Andrea Morris  
 \*Elizabeth Morrison  
 Frank Mullins  
 Mary-Patricia Murphy  
 William Navarra  
 Cecelia Nave  
 Stephen Needel  
 Gail and John Neeld

Network for Good  
 Heidi Nicholson  
 Amanda and Joe Nicolosi  
 Michael Niewoehner  
 Beth and Roger Nott  
 Tim Noyes  
 Tanya Oken  
 \*Denise and Tim Olive  
 Chance O'Rear  
 \*Eric Ottenberg  
 \*Nick Padovani  
 Nita Paris  
 \*Mike Parish  
 Kathleen Parker  
 Dey and Pick Parks  
 John Payne  
 Renee Peace  
 Gerry Peck  
 Reid Penny  
 Cheryl Peppel Lucas  
 Tim Phillips  
 Karen and Joel Piassick  
 Anna Pinneau  
 Rosemary Pitrone  
 Lindsey Prather  
 Christine Prechtel  
 Tammy Purves  
 Kimberly and Brad Putnam  
 Anne Bolling Rainer  
 Stephanie Rand  
 Clarice Reid  
 Ellen Reneke  
 Brian Renshaw  
 Ivy Revell  
 River Collective Co.  
 Megan Roberson  
 Jane Robertson  
 Robl Family  
 Julian Sanchez  
 Kimberly Schager  
 Charles Scribner  
 Carolyn and Brad Sears  
 Silas Shirley  
 James Sibley  
 Maria Simko  
 Richard Simmons  
 \*Katherine Singh  
 Mary G. and Branch Sinkule  
 Jason Smieja  
 \*Danielle Smith  
 Ric Smith  
 Julie Smith  
 Southwire Company  
 employee giving campaign  
 Gena and Mike Spears  
 Taylor Spicer  
 Samantha Spitzner  
 Michael St Louis  
 St. Anne Pacelli Catholic  
 School  
 Joy and Fred Staeck  
 Lisa Steffes  
 Carol Stewart  
 Michelle Stine  
 Dee Stone  
 Stonehedge Garden Club  
 Robert Stout  
 Donna and James Sylvan  
 Allison Tanenbaum  
 Mel Tatman  
 Mack Thicklin  
 Kelly Thomas  
 \*David Todd  
 Total Quality Logistics  
 Robert Tucker  
 Chip Tygart  
 Lynn Boyd and Harry Vann  
 Ganesh Venugopal

Aaron Verhoeven  
 Michelle Vincent  
 Vinings Women's  
 Pacemakers Group  
 \*Sophia Voychehovski  
 Dawn Walker  
 Robert Walker-Branchaud  
 Theresa Ward  
 Warner Bros. Discovery  
 Kent Watkins  
 Bruce Weaver  
 Mary Jane Webster  
 Larry Weiner  
 Westminster School  
 \*Hampton Whatley  
 Elizabeth White  
 Allison White  
 Lisa Whitlow  
 Christine Whitmire  
 Nicole Wien  
 \*Caitlin Williams  
 Robert Williamson  
 Diana Wilson  
 Julie Wood  
 Joel Wooten  
 Helen and Griggs Zachry  
 Zheng Zhou  
 Lilly Zimmer

### IN HONOR OF/ MEMORIALS

*In honor of Tammy Bates*  
 Catherine and  
 John Spillman  
 Dee Stone

*In memory of Douglas Blackmon*  
 Anonymous  
 Patricia Blackmon  
 C2RL  
 Joann Carter  
 Charlene Hiott  
 Susan Levy  
 Amy and Stuart Smith  
 Tempe Stephen  
 Caroll Thomas

*In honor of Arthur Blankenship*  
 Gail Chimo

*In honor of Carlos Bosch*  
 Catherine Clements-Keith  
 Nadia Mastantuono

*In honor of Reid and Jon Davis Chitwood*  
 Bob Chitwood

*In honor of Edward Cook*  
 Marjorie Berman

*In honor of George Davis*  
 Tobey Davis

*In honor of Peggy Fuller*  
 Beth Fuller

*In honor of Andrew Henleben*  
 Cheryl Henleben

*In honor of Henry Jacobs*  
 Jan and Mike Angstadt

*In honor of David Kirkpatrick*  
 Learfield

*In memory of Becca Sue Klein*  
 Brad Gerlach

*In honor of Ken Kreaflle*  
 Riverstone Advisors

*In honor of David and Nicole Lowrance*  
 Jeanne Allison

*In honor of Jerry McKeivitt*  
 Debbie McKeivitt

*In honor of Mike Meyer*  
 Joann and Ken Meyer

*In honor of Jonathan E. Moye*  
 Edward Moye

*In memory of Nicolas Mikhail Needel*  
 Stephen Needel

*In honor of Solon and Marianna Patterson*  
 Nancy and John Patterson

*In honor of Peaceful Existence*  
 Anne Grant

*In honor of Mallory Pendleton*  
 Jennie Inglis

*In honor of Margaret Reneke*  
 Ellen Reneke

*In honor of Susanne Keough and Sydney Roberts*  
 Larimore Roberts

*In memory of Ralph Shaw*  
 Jennie Inglis

*In memory of Ronda Smith's father*  
 Mary Claire Allvine

*In honor of Ted Turner*  
 Mandy and  
 Knox Culpepper

*In honor of Turning Sun School Clairmont*  
 Jennifer Chambers  
 Patrick Deery  
 Paulina Guzman  
 Victoria Kaplan  
 Annie LeVasseur  
 Katherine Wells  
 Jen Wilson  
 Tiffany Zujkowski

*In honor of Jason Ulseth*  
 Fran Meyer and  
 Tom Wickson

*In honor of the Woodward family*  
 Kim Bjorgo

*In honor of Jordan Yu*  
 West Atlanta  
 Watershed Alliance

*Gifts In-Kind*  
 The Alliance Theatre  
 Alpharetta Outfitters  
 Ameris Bank Amphitheatre  
 Atlanta Botanical Garden  
 Atlanta Hawks

*Atlanta Shakespeare Company*  
 Atlanta United FC  
 Beat The Bomb  
 Bobby Jones Golf Course  
 Bold Monk  
 Booth Western Art Museum  
 By Land & By Sea Charters  
 Cartecay Vineyards  
 Chattahoochee Nature Center  
 Matthew Choe  
 Columbus Botanical Gardens  
 Cool River Tubing Company  
 Dad's Garage Theater  
 DB Bar Outfitters  
 Sasi Doddapaneni  
 Robert Eidson  
 Elachee Nature Science Center  
 Flint Riverkeeper  
 Friends of Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites  
 Georgia Aquarium  
 Tom Gore  
 Great Wolf Lodge  
 Gerard Gunthert  
 Naomi Green  
 Habersham Mills  
 Headwaters Outfitters  
 Hello Hilo  
 High Museum of Art  
 The Island at Pigeon Forge  
 Kendra Scott  
 Len Foote Hike Inn  
 Franklin Martin  
 Josh May  
 Mellow Mushroom  
 Gainesville  
 Michael Cuttle & Associates  
 Nantahala Outdoor Center  
 Ormsby's  
 The Orvis Company  
 Patagonia  
 Pontoon Brewery  
 Republic Services  
 Rev Coffee Roasters  
 Reynolds Lake Oconee  
 Maddy Risser  
 Rock City Gardens  
 Sautee-Nacoochee Community Association  
 Six Bridges  
 Six Flags Over Georgia  
 Southern Environmental Law Center  
 Suspensz Kayak Storage System  
 Tellus Science Museum  
 Tito's Vodka  
 Total Wine & More  
 Tower Beer, Wine & Spirits  
 Trash Taxi of Georgia  
 Circe Tsui  
 Unicoi Outfitters  
 Van Michael Salon  
 Tom Wilson  
 Yonah Mountain Vineyards  
 Zoo Atlanta

*\*The Ripple Effect monthly sustainers*

**CRK RECEIVES 100%  
BOARD AND EMPLOYEE  
GIVING**

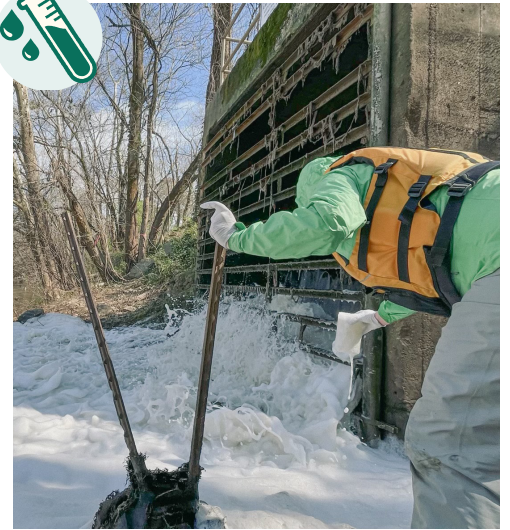
## WHERE OUR WATER COMES FROM – AND WHERE IT GOES – MATTERS

If you live in an urbanized area, your tap water likely comes from a nearby river or reservoir. If you live in the Chattahoochee River watershed, then the water that comes out of your taps comes from the Chattahoochee River or one of its lakes. Not directly, though – first it gets treated to federal standards at your local drinking water plant so that it's safe.

In Atlanta, residents and visitors to the city use millions of gallons of water every day for drinking, bathing, cooking, industry, and more. All the water and waste that flows down the drain ends up in our wastewater treatment

plants. These essential facilities remove contaminants from our wastewater before releasing it back into the river, replenishing our limited water supply for the people, wildlife, and ecosystems who depend on it.

Here on the Hooch, it's especially important that these facilities are kept in working order. That's because on a dry summer day, up to 33% of the river's volume in Atlanta is made up of treated wastewater. Of that, 16% of the volume comes from R.M. Clayton, the largest wastewater plant in Atlanta and in the state of Georgia.



Taking samples at R.M. Clayton, 2024.

## A BIG UPSET ON A SMALL RIVER

The Chattahoochee River is one of the smallest rivers in the world to supply water to a large metropolitan population, meaning that even small amounts of pollution can have a significant impact on water quality downstream. CRK is constantly patrolling to quickly identify problems and hold polluters accountable.

In March of 2024, our staff found dangerously elevated levels of bacteria in the river and tracked it to the source: the City of Atlanta's R.M. Clayton Water Reclamation Center. This crucial

facility is designed to treat and release millions of gallons of wastewater into the Chattahoochee River every day. However, the plant had fallen into a state of disrepair, with broken equipment failing to properly treat the wastewater.

CRK staff made daily trips to R.M. Clayton to collect samples from the river for testing. The results revealed that E. coli bacteria levels in the river at the plant were on average 340 times higher than the amount recommended by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for

safe water recreation. CRK alerted news media and urged recreators to exercise caution for 60 miles downstream of the plant.

High levels of organic material and nutrients from R.M. Clayton also contributed to low oxygen levels in the river, threatening the survival of fish and other aquatic life. To ensure immediate action, CRK filed a new federal lawsuit against the City of Atlanta for its violations of the Clean Water Act in September of 2024.

## INVESTMENTS IN THE RIVER AND OUR FUTURE

Over the last year, CRK and our representation at the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) worked collaboratively with the City to reach an agreement that would stop the pollution and protect the Chattahoochee River.

Under the new leadership of Commissioner Greg Eyerly, the Atlanta Department of Watershed Management (DWM) reaffirmed its commitment to the river by investing millions of dollars

in new equipment, upgrades, and repairs at R.M. Clayton. These investments have already improved water quality in the Chattahoochee River for Atlanta residents and communities downstream.

Today, CRK's testing confirms that R.M. Clayton is once again in compliance with its wastewater discharge permit and is no longer polluting the Chattahoochee River. CRK and the City officially reached a settlement agreement resolving the Clean Water Act lawsuit and finalized a new consent decree in February of 2026. As part of the settlement, the City agreed to complete additional

*Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens (far left) and representatives from the City meet with Riverkeeper Jason Ulseth (far right) and CRK staff.*



R.M. Clayton sits along the Chattahoochee River.

repairs and upgrades over the next five years.

CRK applauds Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens, Commissioner Eyerly, and Atlanta DWM for their partnership and commitment to securing the best possible outcome for the river. Thanks to the City, SELC, and the support of CRK's 10,000 members, we're proud to have secured a cleaner, healthier future for the Chattahoochee River and all who depend on it.





## DATA CENTERS: UNPRECEDENTED BY THE NUMBERS

The development and proliferation of data centers across Georgia is unprecedented. The water and energy demands, as well as the associated community engagement on the topic, are equally unprecedented.

Data centers are buildings filled with computer equipment to process internet traffic, facilitate cloud computing and artificial intelligence, and store increasingly massive amounts of digital data. And new ones are proposed in Georgia on a regular basis.

Statewide, data centers are operating or have been proposed in 45 of Georgia's 159 counties. Over the past year,

approximately 35 cities and counties – including a half-dozen in our river basin – have instituted 90-day moratoria and/or developed new ordinances and building codes to better manage data center development.

CRK tracks data centers' water and energy demand as well as other land and community impacts. We do this because we receive inquiries from people all over the state, country, and globe. We strive to provide accurate and objective information for anyone seeking clarity. However, the data is messy, and information is not always available.

CRK has identified approximately 100

data centers either operating, under construction, or proposed in our river basin. This includes data center facilities that have been quietly operating in downtown Atlanta high-rise buildings for decades and recently proposed projects like the 900-acre Project Ruby in the City of Columbus and Muscogee County.

Of the approximately 100 data centers in the basin, 86 require an estimated cumulative total of 6,400 megawatts of electricity, or the amount of electricity that five nuclear reactors generate. We can only estimate the total square footage for 78 facilities (approximately 50 million square feet of space). Water data is even less accurate: data from 25 – mostly proposed – facilities indicate a possible daily demand of 8 million gallons of water per day from the Chattahoochee, which is a significant underestimation.

CRK will continue to collect water quality data, identify best management practices, and provide policy recommendations to decision makers and community members to mitigate the impacts of data center proliferation in Georgia.

## LAKE LANIER, METRO ATLANTA COMMUNITIES FACE MUSTY DRINKING WATER



Do you live in Metro Atlanta or around Lake Lanier? Did you notice that your water tasted weird last fall? Communities that draw their drinking water from Lake Lanier and the Chattahoochee River experienced significant taste and odor issues in 2025 due to unusually high levels of compounds called 2-Methylisoborneol (MIB) and geosmin.

These compounds are produced by species of algae that respond to conditions in the lake. Each year, as the air temperatures cool, Lake Lanier experiences "turnover." The cool water at the surface becomes more dense and sinks. This causes the algae that produce MIB and geosmin to mix into the lake water column.

The drinking water taste and odor issues happen to some extent every year, especially in communities that get their drinking water directly from Lake Lanier. But it was more noticeable and widespread in 2025, particularly in communities downstream of Lake Lanier like the City of Atlanta. That is

because the water in the river in metro Atlanta is from Lake Lanier and higher concentrations of MIB and geosmin in Lake Lanier mean higher concentrations in the river.

Fortunately, the problem is an aesthetic and not a public health issue. While annoying, the water remained safe to use for drinking and washing with even though it was stinky. Utilities such as Gainesville, Cobb County, Gwinnett County, and the City of Atlanta used activated carbon or ozone treatment to help remove the compounds and are investing in additional treatments to combat the problem in future years.

The taste and odor issues follow years of concern regarding Lake Lanier's overall water quality and algae levels. CRK regularly monitors the amount of algae in Lake Lanier and did not see any abnormal increases in the total amount of algae in 2025. But more needs to be done to protect the health of the lake. To effectively address Lake Lanier's algae levels and overall water quality, more investment is needed to reduce

nutrient pollution, especially from leaking sewer lines and septic tanks, lawn fertilizers, and agricultural and urban runoff.



CRK monitors algae levels on the lake.

# RIVER RENDEZVOUS: HANDS-ON COMMUNITY SCIENCE

The River Rendezvous is a one-day water quality monitoring event where volunteers, CRK, and our community partners sample dozens of creeks sites in one day. Volunteers meet at a central location, receive a brief training, and head out to collect samples from nearby creeks. They bring back small bags filled with creek water and our staff analyzes each sample for water quality on-site in the mobile lab. The data we collect helps provide a snapshot of the health of our waterways. RiverCHAT talked to CRK's Technical Programs Director Jess Sterling to learn more.

## Q: How did River Rendezvous get started?

**A:** In 2013, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper partnered with West Atlanta Watershed Alliance to organize a new community water sampling event in Atlanta, Westside River Rendezvous. It was modeled after the River Rendezvous that the Upper Oconee Watershed Network (UOWN) has been organizing in Athens since the late 1990s. I used to volunteer with them when I lived in Athens. In the years since, CRK has worked with community partners to expand these events to other parts of the Chattahoochee River basin. Full circle – UOWN partners with us on the Headwaters River Rendezvous in Gainesville!

## Q: What is the goal of River Rendezvous?

**A:** We gather a lot of useful water quality data and find water quality problems like sewer spills, but at its heart, River Rendezvous isn't about metrics. It's about connecting people with their watershed and with each other. We get volunteers from all backgrounds – college students, retirees, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts – so it's fun to pair people up, assign them to a creek site, and send them out on a little adventure right in their own neighborhoods.

## Q: What can participants expect?

**A:** It can be hard to describe exactly what River Rendezvous is ahead of time. Part of the fun is that everyone has a slightly different experience meeting new people and discovering hidden parts of their communities. I love to hear people saying, "I didn't realize this place was here. I drive past this building every day and never knew there was a creek behind it!" That's what I think is most special about River Rendezvous.

## Q: Where can people join a River Rendezvous event?

**A:** We've had so much success with Westside River Rendezvous (now in its thirteenth year) in Atlanta. Over the last few years, we have worked hard to expand River Rendezvous to other parts of the watershed like Columbus and Gainesville. We're exploring the idea of doing a one-day, watershed-wide River Rendezvous similar to our Sweep the Hooch cleanup event. That's going to be a big undertaking, but we are building our way up to it. In the meantime, we would love to see you at one of our events in Gainesville, Columbus, or Atlanta in November 2026!

Find more information at [chattahoochee.org/river-rendezvous](http://chattahoochee.org/river-rendezvous)



Just like our weekly Neighborhood Water Watch program, each water sample is tested for water quality parameters including turbidity, conductivity, optical brighteners (like detergents and soaps), and E. coli bacteria (an indicator of sewage contamination).

## RIVER RENDEZVOUS IN 2025

### COLUMBUS RIVER RENDEZVOUS

**52** Sites sampled  
**5** Sewer leaks resolved

### HEADWATERS RIVER RENDEZVOUS

**45** Volunteers  
**42** Samples collected

### WESTSIDE RIVER RENDEZVOUS

**100+** Volunteers  
**74** Sites sampled  
**1** Sewer leak resolved



# BECCA SUE KLEIN ALL KIDS FISH



Photo by Matthew Choe

The Becca Sue Klein All Kids Fish event on October 18, 2025, was a success! Held at the headwaters of the Chattahoochee River, our sixth annual all-girls event welcomed 32 youth, ages 10-16, for a full day of learning, adventure, and connection on the water.

Participants learned to assemble and cast fly rods, tie essential knots, safely handle fish, and understand how a healthy river supports life. In the afternoon, each child was paired with a volunteer river mentor for two hours of guided fishing on trout waters generously provided by our host, Unicoi Outfitters. Many participants felt the thrill of a fish on the line for the first time – several even landed trout and practiced proper handling and safe release.

Beyond fishing, the girls explored aquatic insect life by turning over river rocks, splashing in the water, and giving back by helping clean up the riverbank. The day sparked a lasting connection to both fly fishing and conservation – and for many, this was just the beginning of their journey with the river.

This event was made possible by our incredible volunteers and partners. We are deeply grateful to our volunteer river mentors for sharing their time, skills, and enthusiasm. Special thanks to our inspiring guest speaker, Shyanne Orvis, and to our generous sponsors and partners: Orvis, Orvis Atlanta, Reduce, Sautee Nacoochee Center, Unicoi Outfitters, Cool River Tubing, Andrew Weiner, Headwaters Outfitters, and the GPD Foundation. Because of you, this day made a lasting impact on the next generation of river stewards.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE HOOCH?



Come out and join CRK for exciting community events all spring and summer! From cleanups to music festivals to fly fishing retreats, there's fun for the whole family to discover.



**APRIL 18**  
Earth Day Cleanup in Atlanta

**APRIL 17-18**  
SweetWater 420 Fest – benefiting  
Waterkeeper Alliance

**APRIL 19**  
Columbus Paddle Cleanup

**MAY 9**  
Waterfest at Cumming City Center

**MAY 23**  
Shoal Lily Hike

**MAY 30**  
Becca Sue Klein All Kids Fish  
on Lake Lanier

**JUNE 6**  
Atlanta Paddle Cleanup

[> LEARN MORE](#)

## In memory: Jody Simms

We will miss seeing Jody Simms on the Chattahoochee River. He was everyone's friend and when he wasn't catching fish, he was taking amazing photos of the river, especially on his home stretch near Valley, Alabama.

