



# CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVERKEEPER®

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 23, 2026

## **Drought, polluted runoff, and sewage overflows contribute to Chattahoochee River fish kill**

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (CRK) continues to investigate the unprecedented fish kill on the river directly downstream of Peachtree Creek. Evidence indicates that a combination of factors may have contributed to this event.

### What we know:

The region has been in a drought with minimal rainfall for months. Streams and the Chattahoochee River have been flowing at near-historical low flows.

During rush hour on Wednesday, May 20, the metropolitan Atlanta region – mostly inside the Interstate 285 Perimeter – experienced a reported three inches of rainfall in an hour. Over the following 24 hours, a significant amount polluted runoff, also called stormwater, flowed into Peachtree Creek and then the Chattahoochee River.

On Friday, May 22, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper discovered an unprecedented fish kill in the river downstream of Peachtree Creek. This event did not impact the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area.

### CRK's preliminary investigation indicates a combination of factors contributed to this event.

1. Due to drought conditions, the Chattahoochee River was flowing at a very low level – approximately 750 cubic feet per second. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – the entity responsible for managing the river's flow – is only maintaining minimum flows at this critical waterway junction.
2. The stormwater flows in Peachtree Creek were massive and carried high levels of pollutants. After hitting pavement on a warm day, the stormwater temperatures would have been higher than the creek's typical temperature. Additionally, due to a lack of rain, the stormwater flows carried a high load of additional pollutants and nutrient pollution into Peachtree Creek and the Chattahoochee River.



*Dead fish on the Chattahoochee River –  
May 22, 2026.*

3. Chattahoochee Riverkeeper understands that the City of Atlanta’s combined sewer system and West Area Tunnel overflowed into Peachtree Creek. This emergency overflow of untreated water mixed with the polluted stormwater in Peachtree Creek and then entered the Chattahoochee River. Additionally, the West Area Tunnel treatment system began operating and discharging directly into the river.

At this time, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper believes low flows in the river due to drought, massive polluted stormwater flows from Peachtree Creek, a discharge of untreated combined sewage from the City of Atlanta into Peachtree Creek, and additional treated discharges from wastewater facilities into the Chattahoochee River created the conditions for the fish kill.

Over the last two years, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper has witnessed multiple events that have compromised public and environmental health and safety in the Chattahoochee River below Peachtree Creek.

The infrastructure failures of Fulton County’s Big Creek Water Reclamation Facility (2023) and the City of Atlanta’s R.M. Clayton Water Reclamation Center (2024) placed significant stress on the Chattahoochee River. Chattahoochee Riverkeeper witnessed and reported water quality violations in both cases.

For decades, CRK has consistently advocated for higher river flow levels to ensure public health and safety downstream. Warmer temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, high pollutant loads, overwhelmed infrastructure, and inadequate minimum flows stressed the river to the point of breaking with an unprecedented fish kill as evidence.

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Environmental Protection Division and the City of Atlanta’s Department of Watershed Management are conducting investigations.

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper will continue to investigate this event.

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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 <https://chattahoochee.org>



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