



# CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVERKEEPER®

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Report attributes 45,000 fish killed in Chattahoochee River to combined sewer overflow**

Atlanta, GA – Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (CRK) continues to investigate the unprecedented May 20, 2026, fish kill on the Chattahoochee River in Atlanta downstream of Peachtree Creek. Evidence indicates that a combination of factors contributed to this event, but the primary cause was an overflow of oxygen-depleted water from the City of Atlanta’s combined sewer system into Peachtree Creek and the Chattahoochee River.

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. At the same time, streams and the Chattahoochee River were flowing at near-historical low flows. The region had been in a drought with minimal rainfall for months.

On Friday, May 22, during a routine patrol of the river, CRK’s Riverkeeper and executive director Jason Ulseth discovered thousands of dead fish in the river downstream of Peachtree Creek.

Documents submitted by the City of Atlanta Department of Watershed Management (DWM) to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) indicate that on May 20, 2026, between approximately 5:30 and 10:00 pm, a combination of sewage and stormwater overflowed from DWM’s West Area Tunnel emergency overflow located on Peachtree Creek approximately 700 ft. upstream from the creek’s confluence with the Chattahoochee River. DWM estimated that 5.94 million gallons of untreated and/or minimally treated sewage and stormwater overflowed into Peachtree Creek.

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) released a [fish kill report](#) that estimates approximately 44,500 fish died over 16 river miles from Peachtree Creek to South Fulton due to very low oxygen levels in the river.

The fish kill did not occur upstream in the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, nor downstream in West Point Lake nor the river flowing through Columbus, which is nearly 100 miles downstream of Atlanta.

WRD assigned the value of the fish killed at \$840,000. WRD documented multiple dead fish species including black bass, striped bass, bullhead, catfish, rainbow trout, shad, sunfish, yellow perch, and minnows. The agency did not document the presence of any threatened or endangered species among the fish killed.

The most recent fish kill of a similar magnitude in Georgia occurred on the Ogeechee River in 2011, when King America Finishing, Inc. released pollutants into the water that killed 38,000 fish over 77 miles. In that case, WRD valued the fish at \$125,000.

In its report on the Chattahoochee River fish kill, WRD noted the same conditions that CRK observed on May 22 consistent with a combined sewer overflow event: “low water flows, black sludge along the riverbank and river bottom, sewage odor, presence of excessive trash/litter to include, paper products, sanitary wipes, male contraceptive products, and feminine hygiene products.”

“The City of Atlanta’s sewer overflow system is designed to handle intense storms, so we know that operational failures played a role in the West Area Tunnel overflow,” says Riverkeeper and executive director Jason Ulseth. “As climate change brings more drought and extreme rain events to our region, the City will likely need to adjust its combined sewer operations. We look forward to working with Atlanta DWM as they fully investigate and work to prevent a disaster like this from occurring again.”

CRK continues monitoring dissolved oxygen levels in the river and has observed many healthy fish and other wildlife returning to the waters impacted by the fish kill. More information about CRK’s investigation can be found [here](#).

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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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