



#SaveTheSkinnyWater!

This year we wanted to highlight the important role that creeks play in the overall health of the Coosa River. Creeks, or tributaries, are where most of the water in the river comes from. **Clean water entering from our creeks means a clean lake!** That's why we've got one foot hanging off the dock at the lake, while the other is out working to save the skinny water!

"Skinny water" is slang for shallow water, like a creek. [Our latest fish shirt](#) designed by Board member Richie Gudzan (seen below) features the redeye bass (*Micropterus coosae*) which loves the skinny water!

Our [Coosa Canoe & Kayak Fishing Tournament](#) works to protect and promote the skinny waters by getting people out on them! In July, we are co-hosting [an online Big Bass tournament](#) with [North Alabama Kayak Anglers](#); you can compete for 50% cash payout from anywhere in the state! The other 50% of the \$10 entry fees will be donated to Coosa Riverkeeper to keep us out there working!

Speaking of our kayak tournament trail, here's an update: **Bassmasters Elite Series Pro Steve Kennedy** won the Logan Martin Open presented by Tyler Union in the first of five stops on the trail; the subsequent Neely Henry Open presented by Greater Gadsden Area Tourism and Lake Mitchell Open were won by **David Smith, who is in the lead for Big Wills Outfitters Angler of the Year**. We still have the Coosa Classic on August 15th and Lay Lake Open on September 12th. **Come join the fun!**

While you're on the water this summer **look stylish in one of these great new shirts!** Just like the creek, our stock is running low! [Get one now!](#)



Executive Director Justin and intern Ben collect water quality samples at Big Wills Outfitters for Swim Guide

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Photo © 2015 A. Odrezin

COOSA RIVER SWIM GUIDE HAS ARRIVED!

“Is it safe to swim where I am?” This is one of the questions we are asked the most. Due to a lack of regular monitoring by the State, it’s hard to answer with much authority. **But we just changed all that.**

This summer, every week from Memorial Day to Labor Day, Coosa Riverkeeper staff and volunteers are collecting water quality samples to analyze for *E. coli* and make that data [easily accessible to the public on our website](#) and on [our mobile app “Waterkeeper Swim Guide.”](#) Now you can check river conditions right from your phone or computer before heading out for the weekend!

This year **we are monitoring 14 swimmin’ holes for 16 weeks.** Samples are collected Thursdays and results are reported Fridays around noon. In total this year we plan to collect 400 water quality samples and, with your support, we’ll expand the number of monitoring locations and the length of the sampling season next year (*and the year after!*).

So why is *E. coli* such a big deal? *E. coli* is used as an indicator of the presence of fecal contamination in freshwater streams. When a lot of *E. coli* is present in the stream, it means there may also be some pathogens in

the water that could make you sick - anything from swimmer’s ear to serious infections. Yuck! The state and federal standard for *E. coli* is 235 cfu/100mL for a designated swimming area.

You can sign up to [receive e-mail or text message alerts](#) anytime we post new data to the Swim Guide or if there’s a water quality alert in your area! This is a great free service!

A generous grant from the Coosa Valley Resource Conservation & Development Council allowed us to set up a sophisticated bacteriological monitoring lab in our office. If you’re loving our Swim Guide, help make it possible by donating! A donation in any amount helps keep this going: just \$10 offsets the cost of one bacteria sample!

You can help make Swim Guide better this year! Anytime we make a post to Facebook or Twitter about Swim Guide, share it! This helps more people see it so they can be aware.

Our website is FULL of information so you can learn about *E. coli* and all the other water quality parameters we measure. [Check it out!](#)

Left: *Justinn measures water quality at Gadsden’s waterfront and calls out the results to Ben who records them* (Photo: Abraham Odrezin)

Above: *Riverkeeper Frank labels a sample collected from Choccolocco Creek* (Photo: Steve Gross)



"Is it safe to swim?" Here's the Answer!

As of the publication of this newsletter, **we're a third of the way through our Swim Guide season.** So far we've reported six weeks of data to the public for each of our 14 sites. For the full data set, [check out our website.](#)

On the whole, we've seen that **the swimmin' holes we monitor are safe for recreation!** However, there are some exceptions. **After it rains, E. coli tends to be higher,** most notably at creek sites and large public parks.

We have posted high E. coli alerts so far this season for [Choccolocco Creek](#) (2 weeks), [Coldwater Creek Memorial Park](#) (1 week), and [Pell City Lakeside Park](#) (1 week). We posted moderately high E. coli alerts for [Big Wills Creek](#) (1 week), [Gadsden Piers](#) (1 week) and [Higgins Ferry Park](#) (1 week). With the exception of one of the Choccolocco alerts, all of these advisories occurred after major rain events, most notably a large storm the week of May 28th.

Rain washes waste off our urban and agricultural lands and increases bacteria levels in our streams. That's why you should consider what is upstream before you go swimming the 2-3 days just after a big rain event.

We've recorded levels over 2,000 cfu/100mL on [Choccolocco Creek](#) on multiple occasions (3 of 5 times we tested in late May). In response, **we launched the Choccolocco Creek Monitoring Project in June** to further assess the extent of contamination in the creek. Ten locations on the creek were tested on five occasions in a collaborative project with Ania Burwell and Kiana Hunter from the Ronald E McNair Scholars Program at Talladega College.



The Choccolocco project found **there are areas of the creek with definite bacteria problems,** even in the absence of rain. Half of the sites we monitored had E. coli geometric means that violated Alabama water quality criteria.

At the conclusion of the sampling season (September), we'll be authoring full reports presenting and discussing the results of these two unique projects.



All our data will be submitted to the Alabama Department of Environmental Management and the Alabama Department of Public Health for consideration.

Above: Justinn collects a sample from Coldwater Creek. The result showed it was safe to swim! We see dozens of people swimming here each week (Photo: Steve Gross)

Left: Ania and Kiana measure dissolved oxygen and temperature in Snow Creek in Anniston for the Choccolocco Creek Monitoring Project (Photo: Frank Chitwood)

Attalla Sewer Receives Fine

The City of Attalla has been issued a \$10,400 fine from the Alabama Department of Environmental Management for violations of a Clean Water Act permit at the City's wastewater treatment lagoon. It treats the sewage of Attalla customers before discharging to the creek close to Neely Henry Lake at the James D. Martin Wildlife Park. Violations committed by Attalla in recent years include excessive amounts of *E. coli* and phosphorus, failure to monitor all required pollutants, failure to remove the required percentage of two pollutants, discharging from unpermitted locations in the form of sewer overflows and failure to notify all proper entities about those overflows.

Attalla officials say they will work towards correcting the problem by either sending their wastewater to Gadsden Water Works or Rainbow City Utilities (both of which operate treatment works nearby the lagoon) or by making upgrades to the existing lagoon.

Coosa Riverkeeper filed comments on behalf of our members that argued **ADEM's strategy of enforcing the Clean Water Act is a failure** as seen in the case of Attalla which has violated its permit with consistency for 18 years. Coosa Riverkeeper also argued the penalty amount was too low for the nature of the violations. We also argued that the deadline of December 31st, 2019 to comply with pollution limits at the latest was excessively lengthy. To that end, we were successful and the compliance deadline has been shortened!

Attalla has faced fines for violations at the lagoon before. In 2002, ADEM fined Attalla \$1,200 for a variety of violations. In 2003, the American Canoe Association and the Sierra Club filed a citizen lawsuit against Attalla for a number of violations dating back to 1997. A \$29,750 fine and requirement to implement improvements that were budgeted at \$4 million was ordered by a 2005 Consent Decree with the Alabama Attorney General. ADEM has since issued warning letters to Attalla in 2012 and 2014. The most recent proposed Consent Order is another in a long list of failed enforcement actions.

Coosa Riverkeeper is specifically concerned with the threat of illness to the public that swims, fishes and boats in this area as a result of pathogens found in sewage. High levels of *E. coli* discharged from the lagoon (on one occasion as high as 8,859 cfu/100mL) could endanger the public health.

Become a member of COOSA RIVERKEEPER today!

using this form or online at coosariver.org

Select a level of membership that matches your commitment:

Your membership is 100% tax-deductible

- \$10: Coldwater Darter:** a vulnerable fish that is found only in the Coosa.
- \$25: Blue Shiner:** a threatened fish found on the Little River, Choccolocco and Weogufka Creeks of the Coosa.
- \$50: Pygmy Sculpin:** a threatened fish found only in Coldwater Spring.
- \$100: Lacy Elimia:** a threatened snail found only in the Cheaha, Emauhee and Wewoka Creeks of the Coosa.
- \$250: Southern Clubshell:** an endangered mussel found in the Coosa, Cahaba and Tallapoosa Rivers.
- \$500: Green Pitcher Plant:** a critically endangered, carnivorous plant found mostly in Alabama near the Coosa.
- \$1,000: Coosa River Spotted Bass:** hands down the meanest fighting bass in the nation.
- Other Amount: \$** _____
- I Can Contribute Goods or Services:** _____
- I'd Like to Volunteer!**

Tell Us About Yourself:

Your name(s): _____

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