Issue 23: Fall 2021

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• KEEPING WATCH OVER OUR WATERS SINCE 2010 •

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Swim Guide 2021 made a huge splash!

Swim Guide 2021 Stats

678 water samples collected

44 sites

15 weeks

9 interns

158 water quality alerts issued this summer

61 yellow alerts moderate E.coli

82 red alerts high E.coli

34% increase in access to our data vs. 2020

We prepare all year for Swim Guide season… and it feels like it comes and goes in the blink of an eye. This year was especially exciting with a major expansion of the number of sites we monitor! Thank you to the families and businesses who opened up their docks to us to collect water quality samples this summer. We all owe a TON of gratitude to our Swim Guide Field and Lab Technicians: Bre, JT, Marty, Madelyn, Caleb, Jason, Brannan, Tyler, and Monica. We will see y'all on the dock next year!

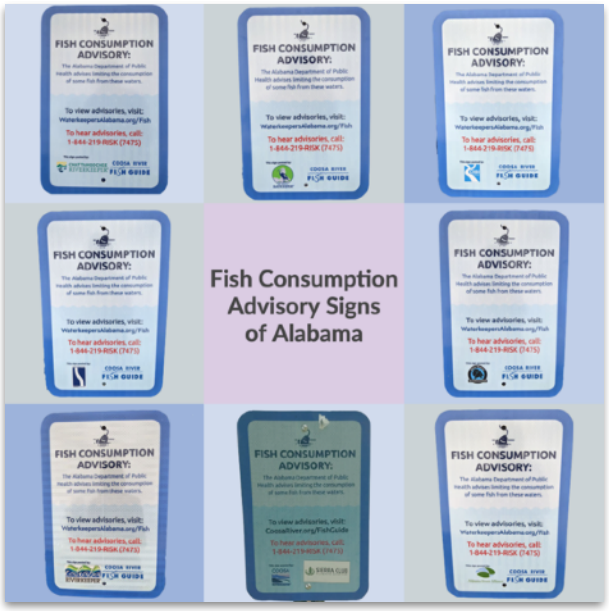
-Justinn, Chad, Abby, Jake, and Victoria

A HUGE THANK YOU TO OUR SWIM GUIDE SPONSORS:

Fall into Fish Guide

Fish Guide is mounting more fish consumption advisory signage across Alabama! Months of preparation and hard work pay off. With the green light from the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, our partner groups are installing over forty permanent metal signs at state-managed freshwater boat ramps all the way from Lewis Smith Lake to the Chattahoochee River to the Mobile Delta.

By May of 2022, there will be a total of 47 fish consumption advisory signs mounted at state-managed boat ramps that fall under active fish consumption advisories. These signs tell the reader that ADPH has issued an advisory nearby, advertise the fish consumption advisory hotline, and directs anglers to CoosaRiver.org/FishGuide or WaterkeepersAlabama.org/Fish for the statewide advisory information



Thanks to our partners in the statewide fish consumption advisory signage project:

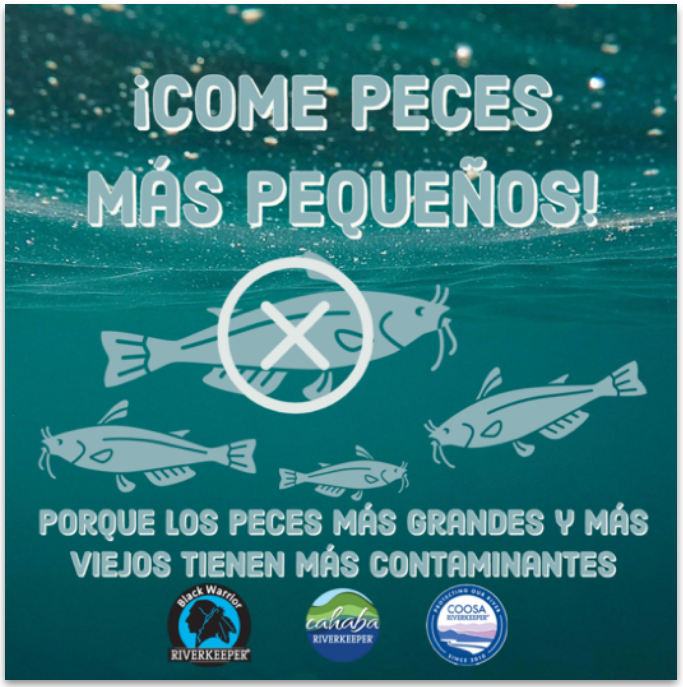
Alabama Dept. of Conservation & Natural Resources
Alabama Rivers Alliance
Black Warrior Riverkeeper
Cahaba Riverkeeper
Chattahoochee Riverkeeper
Choctawhatchee Riverkeeper
Choccolocco Creek Watershed
Coosa River Basin Initiative
Mobile Baykeeper

Help us keep an eye on these awesome signs. Send us a picture if you find one out in the wild & report any vandalism you see to us at info@coosariver.org!

The 2021 Creel Survey Report will be released this fall! Thank you to all 220 anglers that took the time to tell us how they use the Coosa River. We can't wait to show you what we learned!

Here's a little bit to bait you for now…

Over **80%** of Coosa River anglers have been fishing for more than 5 years & over **60%** of those anglers eat Coosa fish.



REEL COOL NEWS Y'ALL! We recently began sharing our Fish Guide materials translated into Spanish with the public! Our state does not offer fish consumption advisory information in Spanish, despite it being the spoken language for up to 5% of Alabama's population. Our website now offers the opportunity to report pollution and learn about Swim Guide en Español!

Nutrient Monitoring

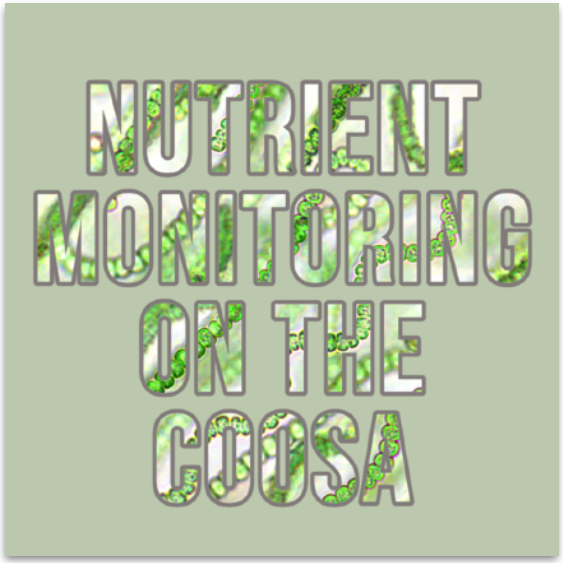
Coosa Riverkeeper is making waves in nutrient monitoring. Far beyond just algae, monitoring nutrients involves tracking just about as many parameters as our Swim Guide program does!

Nutrient pollution refers to contamination of a waterway by excess loading of nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus. Nutrients enter our waterways naturally all the time; however, large influxes of nutrients can happen due to stormwater runoff from urban areas, farmlands, animal feeding operations, and other industry.

When the careful balance of nutrients in our waterways is skewed, it can cause an excess growth of algae, which can contribute to harmful algal bloom growth and fish kills as oxygen is depleted. Nutrient pollution in a waterway is often recognizable by its vibrant green surface water.

How does cyanobacteria play into nutrient pollution?

An excess of nutrients and algae can lead to growth of a harmful algae bloom (HAB). HABs in freshwater systems are often made of blue-green algae, also known as cyanobacteria. Blue-green algae can produce toxins that range in severity from skin irritation to deadly poisoning. This is why you should always stay out of water that is abnormally green, scummy, or foul-smelling.



What's next?

In tandem with the WilsonLab at Auburn University, we periodically monitor nutrients to check for cyanobacteria and harmful toxins in the water column. We are excited to continue working together in the future to learn more about nutrient loading in the Coosa River watershed! Stay tuned for more exciting updates on nutrient pollution monitoring!

Riverkeeper Reflections: Proposed Graphite mine

This summer, Governor Kay Ivey announced the news of Westwater Resources starting a graphite mine operation in Coosa County. The introduction of this mine would lead into sustainable energy sources and the electrification of the Alabama car industry. Coosa Riverkeeper first learned of the exploratory mines in 2013, but it was our understanding they were far from making this a reality at that point.

In recent months we learned the rumblings of the reality of this mining operation and timeline. Since then, our team has been diligently researching, learning, and communicating with experts. Graphite mining has a horrendous environmental history in China. It has the potential to be detrimental to our land, water, and air quality if not properly executed and not adequately regulated. Graphite mining, unlike other mining operations, is still an experiment that the river could face the repercussions for years to come.

The mine will discharge to Weogufka Creek, near Hatchet Creek and Lake Mitchell. As many folks know, Hatchet Creek is one of the most pristine areas in Alabama, home to the only stands of the renowned Rocky Shoals Spider Lilies in the Coosa River basin. It is also a major breeding ground for Redeye Bass, which rely on good water quality for their survival. Thousands of people travel to visit Hatchet Creek and Lake Mitchell every year. The devastation of degradation of such a special area will be felt across Alabama, the River State.

Coosa Riverkeeper supports clean energy and economic development, but not at the cost of public health and water quality. Our organization is the only clean water advocacy group in the Middle and Lower Coosa basins, we will stay true to our mission to protect, restore, and promote the Coosa River and its tributaries in Alabama. However, these steps will have to be monitored closely and chosen wisely at every step. What good is it to make a move toward the production of batteries, an economic win for our state and people, if we will simply be polluting and damaging the tributaries and groundwater of a river system we, the people, depend on for clean drinking water, fishing, biodiversity, recreation, income and respite? We have much to learn about this process and what it means for our river.