

Issue 24: Winter 2022

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Meet the Olive II

Thank you to the many folks who donated to support the purchase of our new patrol boat, the Olive II. This vessel will serve our organization and the Coosa River for years to come!

Our patrol boat is a vital tool for our organization to document the beauty of the river, investigate pollution issues on the water, and educate the public about the value of the river.

For you boat nerds, we have a 2022 SeaArk BayRunner 210, Mercury 150 horsepower motor, Humminbird Helix 9, Minn Kota Ultrex with Spot Lock, manual jack plate, hydraulic steering, and a tandem trailer.



Why is the boat named The Olive?

The boat is named after Popeye the Sailor's boat. Popeye's creator, Tom Sims, was a resident of Ohatchee (on Lake Neely Henry in the present day). Coosa Riverkeeper honors this legend of the Coosa with the naming of our boat.

Talladega College: a new partnership for clean water

Talladega College, founded in 1867, is Alabama's oldest private historically black liberal arts college. The college is located in the heart of Talladega, near Logan Martin Lake and Talladega Creek on the Coosa River.

Last year, we approached the college about a partnership for a service-learning course with their biology department. We're grateful that the administration met us with equal excitement at the opportunity to work with us.



Service learning is an educational approach where students are given the opportunity to combine their learning objectives of a particular course with community service to provide an opportunity for the student to apply their skills to solving a social, environmental, or societal need.

This semester, Dr. Andy Coleman's Ecology course will help Coosa Riverkeeper tackle years worth of self-reported toxic release data into meaningful educational toolkits for folks like you. These students are also undergoing water quality monitoring training as well as learning about careers in conservation.

We're honored and excited to be Talladega College's FIRST service-learning partner.



Major Coal Ash Update

In early 2022, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) took critical steps to protect communities and clean water from toxic coal ash pollution by making it clear that utilities must deal with ash sitting in groundwater, groundwater contamination, and threats to surrounding communities.

From EPA's press release: "the proposed determinations re-state EPA's consistently held position that surface impoundments or landfills cannot be closed with coal ash in contact with groundwater." The press release further states that "closure with coal ash in contact with groundwater puts the health and safety of nearby communities at risk." This announcement marks the first time EPA has enforced the federal coal ash rule by officially denying requests by utilities to continue dumping coal ash into unlined, leaking surface impoundments.

Alabama Power's own filings confirm there is groundwater pollution at every one of their coal ash sites statewide, and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management has confirmed this pollution. The filings have also shown that under current plans to cap-and-close these sites, the utilities plan to leave toxic coal ash soaking into groundwater at every site which will perpetually contaminate surrounding water sources for decades or centuries to come.

In Alabama, the first coal ash pond to close (and pollute in perpetuity) was the Gadsden Plant on Neely Henry Lake. The utility's plans for the Gaston Plant on Lay Lake in Wilsonville are no different— cover it and leave it in place. Coosa Riverkeeper, its members, and partners from across the state voiced strong opposition to those plans through public comments, speaking at the public hearings, and through grassroots organizing.

The bottom line is that cap-in-place does not work & is not an acceptable solution for Alabama. We're glad to see the EPA agrees that Alabama Power should not leave coal ash sitting in groundwater, next to our waterways, and imposing threats to communities.

Coosa Riverkeeper, SELC file suit against Newcastle Homes for stormwater pollution

The Southern Environmental Law Center filed suit on behalf of Coosa Riverkeeper in federal court against Newcastle Homes for consistently violating the Clean Water Act in Shelby County.

In total, Coosa Riverkeeper has documented over 150 instances where Newcastle Homes violated its stormwater permit at its Melrose Landing construction site — a 78-lot subdivision adjacent to the Shelby County Dunnivant Valley Greenway.

Coosa Riverkeeper has collected numerous samples in the North Fork of Yellowleaf Creek, a tributary to Lay Lake, and found that the developer discharged sediment 12-14 times over what its permit allows, which is illegal under the Clean Water Act.

“Newcastle is allowing piles of mud and silt to pollute our creek which has incredibly harmful implications for downstream water quality and habitat. Shelby County communities who want to be able to enjoy our rivers, creeks, and places like the Dunnivant Valley Greenway Trail should not have to bear the burden of Newcastle’s pattern of bad development practices especially when Newcastle has had plenty of time and notice to address these problems.”

-Justinn Overton, Coosa Riverkeeper



Groups Sue Gadsden Water & Sewer Board for Clean Water Act Violations

Coosa Riverkeeper, Advance Etowah, Center for Biological Diversity and Our Children's Earth sued the Water Works and Sewer Board of the city of Gadsden, Alabama for neglecting its duty to maintain public sewers and not properly reporting on sewage pollution that it discharges, in violation of the Clean Water Act.

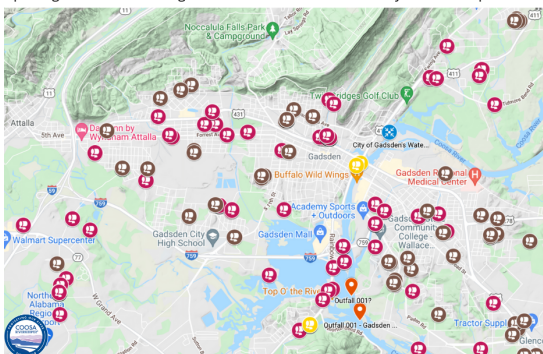
The city's failure to properly maintain its system has resulted in cracked sewer pipes, leaking manholes, blockages and pump-station failures imperiling public health and the environment. The sewer board has allowed public sewers to deteriorate to the point that sewage regularly overflows into homes and local waterways, according to the lawsuit.

This lawsuit seeks to correct these violations and other sewer system and reporting defects that have allowed more than 150 illegal sewer overflows to occur in just the past five years. The chronic sewage overflows cause portions of the Coosa River, Big Wills Creek, and Black Creek to fail Alabama water-quality standards.

The overflows disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color, according to maps prepared using the EPA's Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool.

REPORTED SEWER OVERFLOWS IN GADSDEN FROM 2015-2021

The most immediate health risks associated with SSOs entering our waterways & streets are the potential for human contact and exposure to bacteria, viruses, & pathogens found in sewage. It's clear that Gadsden has a systemic SSO problem.



Meet our Grants Coordinator, Yulan!



Yulan Havlicek
Grants Coordinator

Meet Yulan, our new AmeriCorp VISTA Grants Coordinator! He will be assisting in diversifying resources for our organization. We are so thankful for his dedication to the environment and public health! Read his full bio at CoosaRiver.org/About/OurTeam.

Events are back!

Coosa Riverkeeper is so excited to add our events page back to our new website! We already have events filling up our calendar, so head to CoosaRiver.org/Events to check them out!



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Coosa Riverkeeper events are back and better than ever!

Southern Exposure Film Showing in Gadsden | March 31, 2022

Join Alabama Rivers Alliance and Coosa Riverkeeper for the FREE & IN-PERSON screening of a curated program of Southern Exposure short documentary films. Discussion and Q & A afterwards.

Created in six short weeks during the summer, the Southern Exposure films celebrate special people and places in Alabama. Click here to learn more and see which films will be featured: <https://alabamarivers.org/.../southern-exposure-in-gadsden/>

When: Thursday, March 31, 2022 at 6 PM – 8 PM

Where: The Pitman Theatre in Gadsden

RSVP: Head to our Facebook page [here](#) so we can get a head count!

Fly Fishing Film Tour | April 23, 2022

Alabama Beta: Wet & Wild | Coming Soon...

Great Alabama 650 - The Longest Annual Paddle Race in the World | October 1-10, 2022

Kellypalooza | October 29-30, 2022

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