

# COOSA



## RIVERKEEPER®

Issue 12: Summer 2017



Collecting Swim Guide  
samples from the Coosa  
River in Wetumpka

Photo © 2017 K Kirkpatrick

## 2017 Group of the Year

We're proud to share that **Coosa Riverkeeper** was named "2017 Group of the Year" by [Alabama Rivers Alliance](#) at the Alabama Water Rally at Camp McDowell.

The Alabama Rivers Alliance devotes one evening at each Alabama Water Rally to those special organizations and individuals who have made outstanding contributions toward river protection in our state. Each year, nominations are submitted by members of the Alabama Rivers Alliance.

Thank you to Alabama Rivers Alliance for this recognition and to each of our members for their support! Last year was an amazing year for our programs and the growth of our organization and **we look forward to continual expansion of our Swim Guide, Fish Guide, and Riverkeeper Patrol programs in the coming years with your support!**



Martha Hunter & Jenn Patterson of Alabama Rivers Alliance present Justinn with the 2017 Group of the Year Award!



# Standards for Excellence

[Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama](#) proudly announces Coosa Riverkeeper is the latest [Standards for Excellence®](#) Accredited Organization in Alabama!

**We're the first Waterkeeper Alliance member and only environmental non-profit in Alabama** to earn this national non-profit accreditation. We could not be more proud to receive this recognition and acknowledgment of our commitment to non-profit excellence at all levels of our organization.



*Jennifer Maddox of Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama presents Justinn with accreditation certificate for Standards for Excellence®*

Jennifer S. Maddox, President and CEO of Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama, says, "Coosa Riverkeeper is the most recent not-for-profit organization in our Calhoun County service area to receive the Standards for Excellence national accreditation successfully completing their rigorous accreditation program. It is imperative that not-for-profits of all sizes be effective, efficient, credible and transparent as they strive to meet critical community needs. **Standards for Excellence® provides the tools and templates that enable not-for-profit organizations to improve their policies and practices while maintaining a focus on meeting their mission.**"

# New Fish Advisories

The **2017 Alabama Fish Consumption Advisories** were released this July. Hundreds of fish are collected by state agencies each fall and tested for contaminants, such as PCBs and mercury. The Alabama Department of Public Health then issues advisories based on the results of those tests.

The Coosa River already had advisories on Weiss, Logan Martin and Lay Lakes, as well as Choccolocco Creek. **Those advisories can be viewed on our website at [www.CoosaRiver.org/FishGuide](http://www.CoosaRiver.org/FishGuide).** A few minor changes were noticed in this year's advisory list:

- On Upper Logan Martin Lake, an advisory of "1 meal/month of catfish" was changed to "1 meal/month of Blue catfish and striped bass"
- On Upper Lay Lake, the advisory for spotted bass was changed from "1 meal/month" to "Do Not Eat Any"
- On Upper Lay Lake, the advisory for channel catfish was changed from "2 meals/month" to "1 meal/month"

In addition to advisories, our **Fish Guide website** has an interactive map with boat ramps and marinas and a handy Fish ID guide. [Check it out!](#)



**Above:** We're posting these signs around the river to alert fishermen to the free resources of Fish Guide

# Swim Guide Reaching More Users

The third year of [Swim Guide](#) kicked off in April and a massive increase in public usage of the swim advisory system is evident a little over half-way through the season. The number of subscribers to Coosa Riverkeeper's free text message and e-mail alert system skyrocketed from just under 500 users to nearly 1,600 users as of publishing this article.

A focus of this season's Swim Guide was to **increase the number of people taking advantage of the free information we provide**. One way we're making progress towards that goal is by **posting signage** at the places we test to reach the people who need to know about Swim Guide the most. That is complimented with a postcard mailer to approximately 3,000 waterfront homeowners that live near our Swim Guide sites.

Additionally, **we expanded our radio promotions** with increased advertisements on 94.1 The River in Pell City, new ads on 102.5 The Bull, and underwriting on 90.1 WBHM/91.5 WSGN.

Our social media reach has exploded this summer, partly due to an increase in the number of alerts we have issued due to severe weather. In the week around Tropical Storm Cindy we reached hundreds of thousands of people by Facebook and had tens of thousands of visitors on our website, ultimately **increasing our alert system subscribers by 40% in just a few days**.

This year's Swim Guide is also breaking records for the data itself. **We've already issued more alerts this year (nineteen) than in either of the two previous years**. Mother Nature has blessed us with an above average amount of rainfall this year.



**Above:** One of our Swim Guide signs at Pell City Lakeside Park, a popular swimming beach on Logan Martin Lake.

When that rainfall hits the ground, it carries bacteria from pet waste, livestock operations, and wildlife with it to the nearest creek. It seeps into sewage system infrastructure occasionally overwhelming sewage plants and septic systems. This causes higher levels of bacteria to be present in the Coosa, especially in our creeks.

**We can work to lower rain-associated bacteria spikes** by picking up after our pets, not feeding Canada Geese at the park, investing in the expansion and maintenance of our sewage infrastructure, managing stormwater in our cities, and using best management practices at livestock facilities. Our Riverkeeper Patrol program is our focal point for these efforts, including working to strengthen environmental regulations and taking legal action against non-compliant sewer plants.

**Swim Guide will continue through Labor Day Weekend.** Swim Guide is also

available on the Cahaba River, and rivers and coastal beaches across the United States and internationally in the Bahamas, Canada and even New Zealand via [www.theswimguide.org](http://www.theswimguide.org) and the Waterkeeper Swim Guide mobile app available on all smartphones.



# Join Swim Club Today!

*Where swimmin' holes are loved by kind-hearted folks!*

At Coosa Riverkeeper, \$10 is an investment in cleaner swimming holes. \$10 is roughly the cost to analyze a bacteria sample at one of the recreation spots along the Coosa River that we test every week.

This year we launched a new membership campaign called [Swim Club](#), which is designed to directly benefit the Swim Guide program. For \$10, you can join the club too! You'll receive an exclusive koozie, the results from your bacteria sample, and a sticker in the mail.

We'll also put a sticker with your name on it on one of our samples that week and post a picture of it on social media so everyone can see you support the public's right-to-know about water quality in their river!



**Above:** These kids swimming at Ten Islands Historic Park are thankful to know it's a safe place to swim!

# 2017 Swim Guide Interns



**Brenna Terry**, Swim Guide Lead Intern

Brenna grew up in Huntsville, and has lived in Birmingham since 2012. She attended UAB for a BS and an MS- both in biology, and she is currently pursuing an MPH in Environmental Health and Toxicology. Her goal is to connect her knowledge of nature with human health. Some of her hobbies include spending time outdoors, reading, art, trying new foods and local restaurants, & teaching her rabbit new tricks.



**Serra Martin**, Swim Guide North Sampler

Serra is from Talladega. She studies Aquaculture/Aquatic Biology at Gadsden State Community College. She loves being outdoors swimming, fishing, kayaking and hiking. She keeps floats in her car all the time, because she never knows when she might go swimming!



**Alana Brock**, Swim Guide South Sampler

Alana is a native of Somerville, and is currently pursuing an MPH with a focus in Environmental Health and Toxicology at the UAB. She spent the following year with Impact America, an AmeriCorps program, immersed in public health and non-profit work. Alana hopes to use her degree and field experience to pursue a career in monitoring water quality and protecting the health of both people and the environment. In her spare time, Alana enjoys hiking, backpacking, and rock climbing.