COOSA RIVERKEEPER®

Issue 16: Summer 2019

Photo © R. Gudzan

MEET OUR NEW RIVERKEEPER

Steven grew up learning to the love the Coosa from an early age by taking every chance to attend summer camp at YMCA Camp Chandler located on Lake Jordan. There, he got to run around and swim, fish, and "blob" to his heart's content. Later, he would take that love of the river and explore the different areas of Alabama by canoe or kayak. Steven is happiest when he can share his love for the outdoors with friends and family.

Steven interned with the Coosa Riverkeeper in 2014 and admired their goals and continued showing support as a fantastic volunteer after the internship concluded. He graduated from Birmingham-Southern College in 2016 with a B.A. in Urban Environmental Studies.

After college, he started working at Spectrum Environmental Consulting. At Spectrum, he initially worked as a Stormwater Technician working on Construction/Industrial Stormwater Common Best Management Practices inspections and reporting. He later worked at Spectrum as a Natural Resources Biologist focusing on Waters of the U.S. delineations and permitting.

Welcome Aboard, Steven!

WHAT'S IN YOUR CANNONBALL, Y'ALL?

NEELY HENRY + TRIBUTARIES

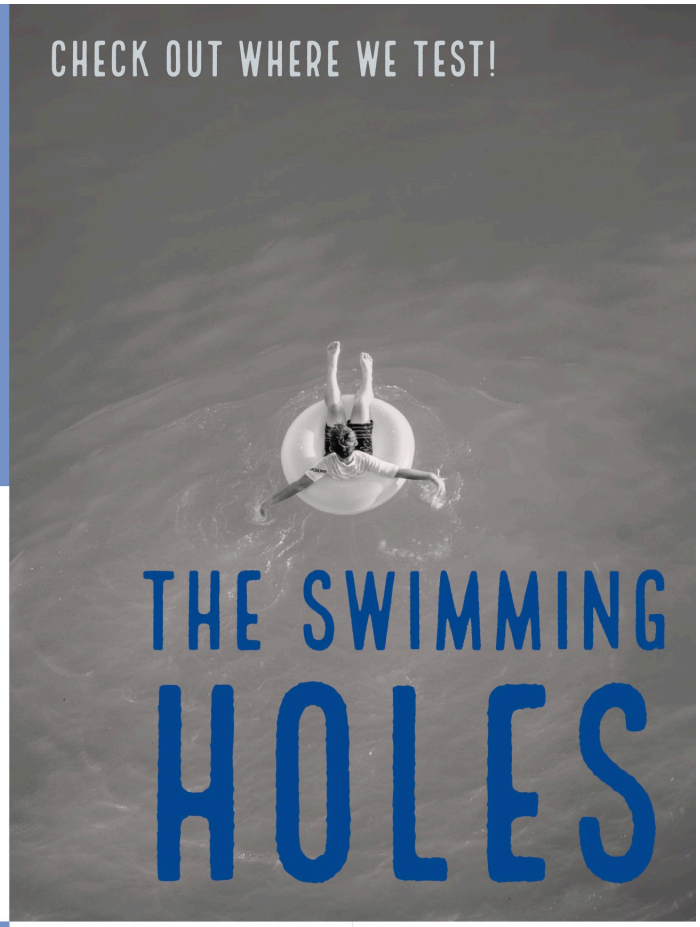
Little Canoe Creek
Big Canoe Creek- 231
Canoe Creek Launch
Big Wills Creek
Mills Pond- Hokes Bluff
Gadsden Riverfront
Lake Gadsden
Rainbow Landing
Ten Islands Park

LOGAN MARTIN + TRIBUTARIES

Seddon Point
Pell City Lakeside Park
Cropwell Branch
Stemley Bridge Road
Lower Choccolocco
Coldwater Creek
Middle Choccolocco
Lake Shore
Clear Creek Slough
Logan Martin Dam Park

LAY LAKE + TRIBUTARIES

Lay Lake at Bulley Creek
Shelby Shores
Spring Creek
Lay Dam Boat Ramp



LAKE MITCHELL, LAKE JORDAN + TAILWATERS

Higgins Ferry Park
Hatchet Creek Park
Weoka Creek Slough
Wetumpka
Bonner's Point

COOSA RIVERKEEPER®

WATERKEEPER® SWIM Guide

COOSARIVER.ORG
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4 WAYS TO GET DIVE INTO OUR DATA

Check out the data on Facebook, Twitter, & Instagram!

Find the data online at CoosaRiver.org/SwimGuide!

Text "SWIMGUIDE" to 844-83 to get water quality information directly to your cell phone!

Listen for our ads on WBHM 90.3!

Look for our Swim Guide & Fish Guide signs around the lake and at boat ramps on the river.

COAL ASH IS CONTAMINATING YOUR RIVER

Clean water is vital to a healthy lifestyle, good coffee/beer/sweet tea/lemonade, and good times for the many who enjoy swimming, fishing, and boating. But y'all, we have a problem and its name is coal ash.

GADSDEN STEAM PLANT

Location: Gadsden Steam Plant is located .6 mile upstream from a drinking water intake on Lake Neely Henry.

A view of a the Gadsden Coal Ash pond from above thanks to a flight from Southwings! photo: F. Chitwood

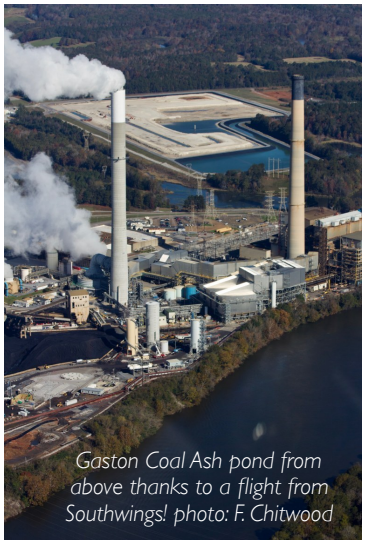
Lifecycle: The coal ash pond was one of the first coal ash ponds to close. It was left on the banks of the river in September 2018. Alabama Power claims this method of "cap and place" is completely safe way to deal with this toxic sludge.

NOW: In May 2019, Alabama Power was fined $250,000 for groundwater contamination at 18 wells around the site. Gadsden Steam Plant's coal ash pond is currently leaking arsenic-10,000% higher than the limit - and radium into our groundwater. Alabama Power claims the presence of the coal ash "has no indication of any effect on any source of drinking water."

GASTON STEAM PLANT

Location: The Gaston Steam Plant is located 4 miles upstream from a drinking water intake in Shelby County on Lay Lake.

Lifecycle: Alabama Power announced last year they planned to leave the coal ash and gypsum pond on the Coosa River. So, there's still time for Alabama Power to do the right thing and remove the toxic waste off the river…



Gaston Coal Ash pond from above thanks to a flight from Southwings! photo: F. Chitwood

NOW: Alabama Power Company released groundwater monitoring data last year for the Gaston Steam Plant in Wilsonville to the public and indicate that both the coal ash pond and the gypsum pond are leaching into groundwater. Simultaneously, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management announced it would fine Alabama Power $250,000 for this contamination at Gaston.

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We firmly believe that leaving the ash to sit in an unlined pit and pollute the nearby groundwater for decades to come is irresponsible. Alabama Power's own data shows that the "cap in place" method of dealing with coal ash will not cut it.

As a concerned citizen, please urge your elected officials and Alabama Power to do the right thing and move their ash off our OUR river! Take action and send a letter to your elected officials!

A LITTLE DIRT DOES HURT

A large number of our citizen complaints lately have come from concerned folks living next to areas that are being developed.

Folks tend to think, "So what? it's just a little dirt!" At construction sites dirt is carried away by rainwater and into the nearest stormwater ditch or stream. **That dirt muddies the water which harms wildlife, and eventually settles out of the water and onto the bottom of the river, which negatively impacts both wildlife and recreation.** In addition to dirt, the sheer volume of water that crashes into streams from uncontrolled construction sites causes erosion and flooding, sometimes overtopping roads, filling private and public lakes, and damaging private property.

Under mandated stormwater permit requirements, developers must utilize Best Management Practices to prevent uncontrolled volumes of dirt from being washed away and to reduce the turbidity in downstream waterways. **Here are some examples of construction stormwater failures we've seen lately…** please take pictures if you see something fishy and report this pollution to us!

So, what's wrong here?

Top Left: dirt from a construction site flowing into a neighboring lake;
Top Right: a poorly installed silt fence that failed after a rain event;
Bottom Left: improper maintenance of road by not sweeping street and straw wattle needs replacing.

WATER CLARITY and ALGAE

Our Citizen Scientists have turned their collective attention from tracking water temperature to **now collecting water clarity data to keep track of changes in water color over time using a Secchi Disk.**

Our Program Manager, Karli, using a Secchi Disk off a dock on Logan Martin Lake

We don't want to share our swimming & fishing holes with Lyngbya, a toxic algae! Each week, **our monitors take Secchi Disk readings off their docks and record, in centimeters, how far they can see that day.** We use this data in conjunction with our collaboration with Auburn University, where we are testing the actual species of algae on the river. **With the CSI data, we are able to pin point problem areas & track how the water is changing over time in the Coosa.**

Lyngbya is really bad for our river for a lot of reasons, but here are the four main ones:

Aesthetic: It smells bad and it's not easy on the eyes either.
Boating, swimming & fishing: It can form dense, dark mats that look like sewage or decomposing grass. Those mats can hinder navigation on the river and fishing – you're not bringing a lure through a mat of Lyngbya without a frustration!
Human Health: A bad bloom produces toxins that can cause skin irritation to the fisherman who sticks his hand down in the water or a swimmer. It is also toxic to fish.
Persistence: It often ends up mixing in with the good grasses that we'd like to see growing on the lake. Lyngbya forms a very strong outer sheath through the growing season goes on which protects it from algaecide treatments.