

NEIGHBORHOOD WATER WATCH STRENGTHENS COMMUNITY

When Amanda Mayberry moved to the intown Atlanta neighborhood known as Collier Hills two years ago, she was thrilled that her street bordered Tanyard Park and its babbling creek.

To get more involved in her community, Amanda attended a meeting of the **Collier Hills Civic Association** where UCR Technical Programs Director Jason Ulseth was a speaker. He talked about our new **Neighborhood Water Watch (NWW) Program** and cited the results of samples already taken from the creek.

"I was pretty horrified at the numbers of the *E. coli* bacteria that Jason said they were pulling out of the creek," said Mayberry. "This is our neighborhood's creek; the neighbors are down here on the path every day ... and I really didn't want to have such a polluted creek right here around us."



Water quality in Tanyard Creek improved after the city of Atlanta fixed a sewer blockage identified through UCR's volunteer monitoring program.

High levels of bacteria found in some urban creeks, such as Tanyard, can come from cracked and overflowing sewers, failing septic systems and polluted stormwater runoff. High bacteria levels can indicate sewage leaks and spills, posing a serious health risk.

The long-term data compiled by UCR is used to determine if local bacterial contamination is occurring – and in some cases, where it's coming from. Results collected as part of the NWW Program also are entered into **Georgia's Adopt-A-Stream (AAS)** database.

AAS is Georgia's volunteer water quality monitoring program, which currently has 188 active groups across the state. For the second year

in a row, UCR was named the most active AAS group in the state with 366 water samples collected and analyzed in 2011. We were honored to receive this year's AAS Watershed Award.

Contamination sources found in Atlanta streams

Once high levels of bacteria were confirmed in **Tanyard Creek**, UCR worked closely with the city to locate an outfall pipe or storm drain into the creek and upstream of the park, which was a likely source. After an extensive investigation by the city, the culprit was found — a clogged sewer line causing sewage to flow into the storm drain and the creek. The city fixed the problem and tests have revealed improved water quality.

"This is a great example of a collaborative partnership among residents, a nonprofit and a local government," Ulseth said.

In **Proctor Creek**, samples collected by **West Atlanta Watershed Alliance's Darryl Haddock** have shown continuous high bacteria levels. The primary source appears to be in the area of the city's de-commissioned Greensferry Combined Sewer Overflow facility, according to a joint monitoring effort among the Atlanta Regional Commission, Georgia's Environmental Protection Division, the city and UCR.

"The city is in the process of tracking this source through a series of underground pipes," Ulseth said, "and we anticipate the problem will be found and fixed in the near future."

In a stream flowing through **Atlanta's Ansley Park** neighborhood, local residents have been pleasantly surprised to learn that the bacteria levels were much lower than expected.



Volunteer Amanda Mayberry pulls a water sample from Tanyard Creek in Atlanta's Collier Hills neighborhood.

Monitoring program expands to Gainesville

In January, UCR purchased an additional *E. coli* laboratory for our Headwaters office in Gainesville, with funding support from LUSH Cosmetics. We are currently working to build new partnerships with community members in the area, which has several streams with potentially high levels of bacteria.

Flat Creek, a tributary to Lake Lanier in Gainesville, has been designated "impaired" by the state for failure to meet bacteria standards. Students from **Gainesville State College** have agreed to partner with UCR to monitor Flat Creek, as part of a class watershed project.

If you would like to volunteer with UCR for the NWW Program, please contact Jason Ulseth at julseth@ucriverkeeper.org.

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