

REAL-TIME MONITORING PROGRAM IN RIVER PARK CELEBRATES 10TH YEAR!

Public service partnerships that stand the test of time tend to exhibit certain qualities—the strong commitment of the people and agencies involved, an ability to adapt to change and the importance of the mission or service provided.

More than a decade ago, the Clinton administration urged federal agencies to develop public-private partnerships in local communities to improve the quality of life for their citizens. Then, as today, one of the greatest environmental challenges has been to secure scientifically-based water quality monitoring data to inform water users and decision-makers.

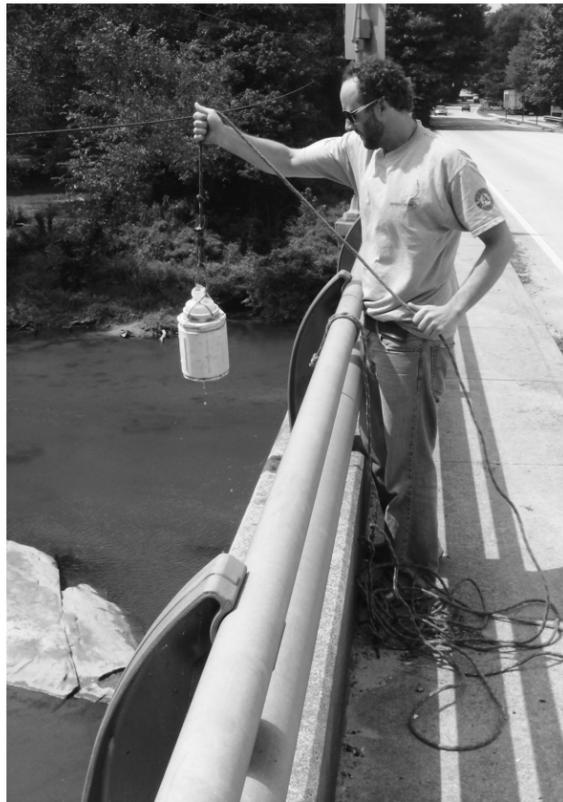
Because of historically high levels of indicator bacteria in the Chattahoochee River, the concept of a bacteria alert network was proposed as a possible public-private project and a means to inform people when bacteria levels within the **Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area** (CRNRA) exceed EPA criteria. A 48-mile river park between Buford Dam and Peachtree Creek in Atlanta, the CRNRA contains about three-fourths of all the public green space in the 10-county metro Atlanta area; it draws more than 3.5 million visitors annually, at least a third of whom participate in water-based activities.

USGS Leads Data Collection

Led by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), the nation's premier water monitoring agency, the **BacteriALERT Program** began ten years ago this fall. Current partners include the National Park Service and Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper—who take weekly water samples at Paces Ferry Bridge in Vinings and Medlock Bridge—and funding partners, Cobb County Water System, Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority and the city of Atlanta. Other partners who have supported the program financially in the past include the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, Trust for Public Land and several local foundations.

The primary objective of BacteriALERT is to collect and analyze water samples for total coliform and Escherichia coli (E. coli) bacteria. Results are posted on a publicly-accessible website (<http://ga2.er.usgs.gov/bacteria/SummaryIntroduction.cfm>) within 24 hours of data collection to provide river users with current predictions of E. coli bacteria concentrations within the CRNRA. A second objective is compilation of the statistical analysis and interpretation of the data under a wide range of seasonal, weather and river conditions.

Since it takes a minimum of 18 hours to culture each water sample to determine bacteria levels, predicting bacteria concentrations in “real-time” requires using



UCR intern Mike Meyer collects a water sample at Paces Ferry Bridge.

other indicators, such as turbidity, that have a correlation to bacteria. Estimating bacteria concentrations from turbidity is a new and inexact science, however, and the statistical model that ties the two together is not always a simple straight-line correlation.

USGS hydrologist and water quality specialist Steve Lawrence will complete an important report by early 2011 that relates turbidity to bacteria counts. Once approved through a peer-reviewed process, this analysis should allow real-time predictions of bacteria levels through turbidity samples, which will be even more useful to anyone who uses the river.

Safe for Recreation, Except When It Rains!

Every day, hundreds of people visit the USGS website to learn about the health of the Chattahoochee River; several hundred more receive weekly emails with data from the highly successful BacteriALERT Program.

Data analyses from 1473 samples taken to date show that bacteria levels fluctuate greatly. Not surprisingly, storms significantly impact the river's water quality. When the river is muddy after it rains, bacteria levels can be very high from sewer overflows and runoff from yards, streets and industrial areas—not a good time to get too close to the water. The good news is that except when it has just rained (about 15% of the samples evaluated), the water in the CRNRA is safe for recreation by people in good health.

The BacteriALERT Program is the only one of its kind in the Southeast and one of just a few in the nation where real-time data is collected in a similar public-private partnership. UCR is honored to be a key participant in this collaborative effort.

According to USGS District Chief Ed Martin, “The BacteriALERT Program has greatly expanded our scientific understanding of bacteria in the Chattahoochee River. This knowledge is used to promote the maximum safest recreational use by the public of the river and is a wonderful example of what can be accomplished when stakeholders work together to accomplish a common goal.”

None of this would have been possible without a decade of UCR interns who have served as the boots on the ground and to whom great thanks are due. They have been collecting river samples at the Paces Ferry Bridge under the supervision of UCR staff, currently our technical programs director, Jason Ulseth.

For more information, see USGS website:

<http://ga2.er.usgs.gov/bacteria/SummaryIntroduction.cfm>

RIVER CLEANUPS BUILD SENSE OF COMMUNITY

River, lake and stream cleanups help improve the health of our local waterways, but they can do even more. Cleanups are a great way to foster a sense of “river community,” educate participants about the values of watersheds, and find and fix negative impacts to the waterway.



Georgia Aquarium employees join UCR in cleanup of Proctor Creek.

This year, Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper organized 20 cleanups on the Chattahoochee and the tributaries that flow into the river—with the help of 18 organizations and businesses and more than 750 volunteers who removed at least 15 tons of trash from the water and shore.

Yes, we found the usual: plastic bottles, plastic bags, balls of every description, clothing, shoes, toys and tires (68, now recycled). We also found a large pond fountain, hot tub jets, two dog houses, a kid's play house, 15 plastic chairs, bicycles, car parts, appliances and an Old Town Canoe that we refurbished and added to our fleet!

Partners Make a Huge Difference

Our river cleanup community doesn't just include neighbors to the river. Local businesses and organizations involved their employees and volunteers in our cleanups

in 2010. Forty employees from Cox Enterprises joined several folks from RIOT Atlanta to clean up a section of **North Fork Peachtree Creek** near I-85. “We found an incredible amount of trash in a small area, including 25 tires,” says Jessica Laiti, corporate responsibility specialist for Cox Enterprises. “The cleanup was well-organized and fun. We look forward to volunteering with UCR again.”

UCR also continued its partnership with the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance to improve **Proctor Creek** in northwest Atlanta with cleanups and community service days. “Through this partnership we have engaged churches, homeowners and state, county and city agencies in addressing a long list of environmental stressors,” says Darryl Haddock of the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance.

Thanks to all of our 2010 cleanup partners, including: Cox Conserves, Kimberly Clark, Hewlett Packard, 92.9 DaveFM, 99x Foundation/Rock100.5, Perkins+Wills, Heery International, RIOT Atlanta, Georgia Aquarium, Soque River Watershed Association, Earthshare of Georgia, Trout Unlimited, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, Grove Park Recreation Center, English Avenue/Vine City Neighborhood Association and National Park Service.

Get Out!

Laurel Ridge Trail at Lanier

If you want to hike along Lake Lanier, Buford Dam and the Chattahoochee River all at one time, the Laurel Ridge Trail is a great place to go! The 2.7 mile path starts on the Gwinnett County side of Buford Dam in Lower Overlook Park, which has ample parking and restrooms. Clearly-marked and well-maintained, the trail follows the lake shore, crosses Buford Dam Road, and travels down to the river and back up to the parking area. It includes a mixture of trails, stairs and decks and features outstanding views of the lake and the river. Fall is particularly stunning with autumn foliage. Note that dogs are not allowed on Corps of Engineers property. You can find more information about the trail on www.lakelanier.com.





Reflections

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Our mission is to advocate and secure the protection and stewardship of the Chattahoochee River, its tributaries and watershed.

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"Shall we gather at the river... with its crystal tide forever flowing...?" (Robert Lowry, 1864)

This 150-year old Baptist hymn was running through my mind on a warm Saturday afternoon in September when I joined more than 100 lovers of rivers and nature on the banks of the **Ogeechee River in Hancock County**. We celebrated the river's history, toured an old grist mill and helped launch a new book, *Bartram's Living Legacy* (Mercer University Press, 2010).

Sixteen of the South's finest nature writers contributed essays to this anthology and most were on hand to talk about the debt they and the rest of us owe to William Bartram, a Philadelphia naturalist who explored our region in the mid-1770's. I was prompted to wonder: what will the Ogeechee and all of Georgia's rivers look like two hundred years from today?

Then and Now

In the 1850s, Hancock was one of the richest counties in Georgia with a thriving cotton industry and a large, hard-working population yet, within a decade it was all gone. Near the time Lowry wrote his hymn, Georgia's leaders made a series of decisions that irrevocably changed the history of the Ogeechee, Hancock County, Georgia and the nation.

Cotton fields turned to grain, corn and hogs for the Confederate Army after Georgia seceded and threw its fortunes in with the Confederacy. Wealth and the labor on which it was built bled away after the Civil War. Although the Ogeechee continues on its path to the sea, no longer tainted by red soil from fields when Cotton was King, today Hancock is one of the poorest counties in the country.

November—a Turning Point?

We face another potentially critical moment in Georgia's history.

The Chattahoochee River has supplied life-sustaining water for four decades of exponential growth in metro Atlanta—and also carried away the region's waste as wealth grew and many prospered. That rampant growth may be coming to an end, and opportunities for continued prosperity will depend in large part on decisions made in the very near future.

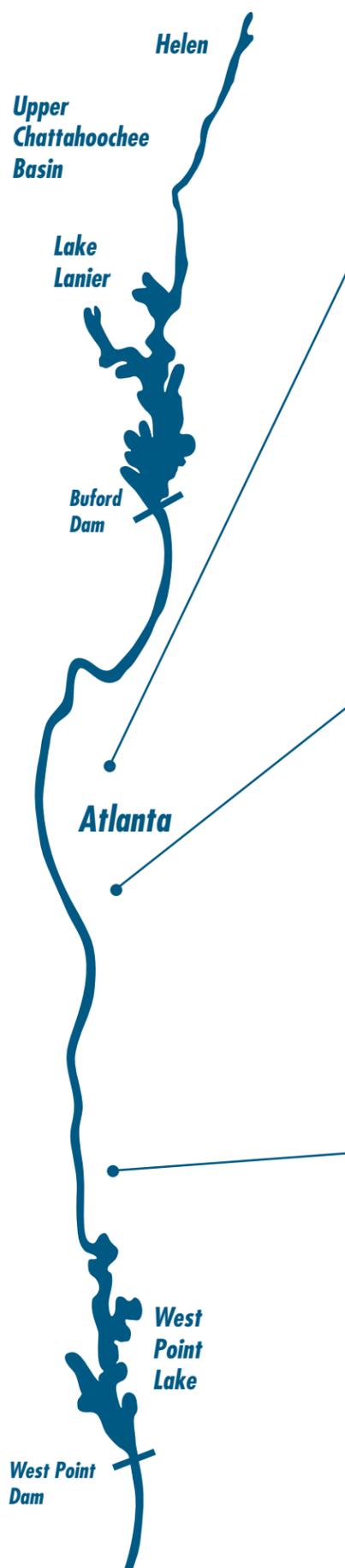
Historical epochs offer critically important choices often unrecognized by the people making them. Until recently, few people understood that Georgia's capitol city could, and would, run out of sufficient water. For decades, critical water management decisions were left with lawyers to resolve through legal action, delaying what now looks inevitable.

In November, Georgia will elect either **Roy Barnes** or **Nathan Deal** as Governor. The winner must choose to continue the state's stubborn path of resistance to sharing water with neighboring states (and downstream Georgians), or to boldly change direction and chart a new course for Georgia's water security.

Decisions will be made on our next governor's watch with a court-ordered deadline of July 2012 to resolve the decades-old water conflict. Do we realize the choices before us? Will one of these men be strong enough, and fair enough, to make the right choices for the future of all Georgians and their rivers?

Only time will tell.

Sally Betha
Executive Director and Riverkeeper



On Patrol

For further details on UCR's investigations and enforcement actions, go to www.chattahoochee.org/on-patrol.

METRO DISTRICT GETS SERIOUS ABOUT CONSERVATION

Water utilities relying on the upper Chattahoochee River for water supply received a wake-up call in 2009 when a court ruling significantly limited their access to Lake Lanier. In response, these utilities began meeting weekly to revisit conservation measures previously rejected as infeasible and/or expensive. UCR has long promoted many of these cost-effective, sustainable measures. The **Metro North Georgia Water Planning District** (Metro District) is reconsidering measures, including expedited leak reduction, plumbing retrofits, multi-family toilet rebates, Water Sense efficiency standards for new homes, and state legislation limiting clothes washer and dishwasher sales to efficient models. UCR will continue to work to facilitate adoption of these and other measures. *Contact: Laura Hartt, lhartt@ucriverkeeper.org.*

UCR AND PARTNERS MONITOR PROCTOR CREEK

UCR is helping lead a community effort to clean up Proctor Creek, an urban stream which flows through Atlanta from the Georgia Dome to the Chattahoochee and is contaminated with bacteria and other pollutants. The **Atlanta Regional Commission** (ARC) received a grant from the Georgia EPD to develop a monitoring program focused on the potential pollution sources. ARC implemented the plan with the assistance of partner groups including the city of Atlanta, EPD, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, and UCR. This fall, crews collected samples every week from 16 sites on Proctor Creek and delivered them to UCR's water quality laboratory for analysis of E. coli bacteria. This data will help identify "hot spots" along Proctor Creek and provide information that could help stop the pollution. *Contact: Jason Ulseth, julseth@ucriverkeeper.org.*

HOGANSVILLE ORDERED TO STOP SEWAGE OVERFLOWS

Overflows of raw sewage from Hogansville's sewer system have sparked public outcry, aggravated by the town's failure to issue public health warnings. UCR investigated complaints that Hogansville repeatedly spilled millions of gallons of untreated sewage into **Yellowjacket Creek**, which flows through Troup County into **West Point Lake**; we found that the town improperly reported its discharges to the state. Constructed more than 50 years ago, Hogansville's wastewater facilities are in desperate need of repair. In June, EPD ordered the town to pay a penalty and take corrective actions, including the repair of sewer lines, manholes, and treatment ponds; a system assessment; a capital improvement plan; and identification of funding sources for repairs. UCR will continue to monitor Hogansville's compliance with the corrective action plan. *Contact: Juliet Cohen, jcohen@ucriverkeeper.org.*

CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROTECTS UNION CITY NEIGHBORHOOD

Five years after UCR settled our lawsuit against the **Georgia Department of Corrections** (GDOC) for violations of the federal Clean Water Act, we finally secured the permanent protection of 11 acres of land adjacent to the Valley Lakes Community in south Fulton's Union City.

Owned by the state of Georgia, this property was once slated for a major expansion of GDOC's **Larmore Detention Facility**.

Final Component of Settlement

The permanent protection of the Larmore property is the last component of a settlement agreement reached in a 2005 lawsuit brought by UCR on behalf of our members and residents in the Valley Lakes Community.

Uncontrolled land disturbing activities at the Larmore construction site sent tons of sediment into wetlands and streams. After unsuccessfully seeking the assistance of local and state agencies, the residents of the Valley Lakes Community asked UCR to help stop the erosion and sedimentation that was damaging their wetlands and streams as a result of the state's land clearing activities.

UCR investigated the site and documented numerous failures to abide by state and federal water protection laws and the resulting impact to the wetlands and streams downstream of the GDOC site.

Ultimately, the area was restored and a portion of it is now permanently protected. America's Watershed Landkeeper, a supporting organization to UCR, holds the land in trust and will monitor the property to ensure that no land disturbing activity is undertaken there. *Contact: Juliet Cohen, jcohen@ucriverkeeper.org.*



Juliet Cohen, AJ James, Sally Betha and Pat Phillips (from left to right) celebrate the completion of the conservation easement near the Valley Lakes Community.

NEWTOWN FLORIST CLUB BREAKS GROUND, COLLECTS RAINWATER

Formed in the 1950s by women in Gainesville's Newtown community, the **Newtown Florist Club** started with members caring for the sick and buying flowers for community funerals. Through the turbulent 1960s and 70s, Club members became vocal leaders for civil rights and improvements in the industrial area surrounding their community.

They continue this fight today, as leaders in environmental justice and change. As part of this effort, they are establishing a community garden in their neighborhood with a \$20,000 donation from Cargill; ground was broken for the garden in July.

Hand-Painted Rain Barrels

Bonny Putney, UCR's Headwaters Outreach Coordinator, participated in the ground-breaking ceremony by donating two hand-painted rain barrels and kicking off a rain barrel



Bonny Putney shows members of the Newtown Florist Club how to finish the rain barrel fittings during a workshop at the club office.

Photo courtesy of The City of Gainesville Water Department/
Kevin Finny

program that will be offered through the Club in the coming year. Held in late August at the Florist Club's office, the first workshop attracted a dozen participants.

With support and assistance from Gainesville's **Water Department**, UCR organizes rain barrel workshops to promote rain harvesting for use in outdoor watering. Additional workshops will be offered in Newtown and other locations in the city. UCR plans to expand the partnership to include other learning programs and support for the many adult and youth groups in the Florist Club.

UCR's Rain Barrel Program is part of an ongoing partnership with **The Coca-Cola Company** and **World Wildlife Fund** to re-purpose Coca-Cola syrup containers to conserve water and energy and help control stormwater. To date, we have placed 600 barrels with homeowners, an estimated savings per summer of one million gallons of water! *Contact: Bonny Putney, bppetney@bellsouth.net.*

GEORGIA TO PROTECT FRESHWATER TURTLES FROM OVERHARVESTING

The southeastern United States is one of the world's richest regions in terms of turtle diversity, and Georgia is no exception. Of the roughly 250 species of freshwater turtles known worldwide, 19 (or nearly 8%) are native to Georgia.

The Chattahoochee River is home to two rare turtles, both designated as threatened by Georgia: the Alligator Snapping Turtle, which is the world's largest freshwater turtle, and the Barbour's Map Turtle, which is endemic to the lower Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint river basin. Some of the Chattahoochee's more common natives include the Painted Turtle, River Cooter, Eastern Box Turtle, Mud Turtle, Musk Turtle, Pond Slider and Spiny Softshell Turtle.

Threats at Home and Abroad

Globally and locally, turtle populations have declined dramatically. Major threats include habitat loss, collisions with vehicles, predation and overharvesting for the commercial pet trade and oriental food markets. Sadly, much of Asia's growing demand for Georgia turtle meat has been

driven by the virtual collapse of many of Asia's own turtle populations after intense commercial harvesting.

Turtles have a unique life history that makes them vulnerable to overharvesting. Although adult turtles may survive for several decades, they do not reach sexual maturity for 5-10 years. Adult turtles also have small clutches (i.e., few eggs/nest), while young turtles have a low chance of survival to adulthood. Based on these traits, most biologists agree that turtle populations cannot sustain even moderate harvests, particularly because the "meatier" adults are targeted.



River Cooter, *Pseudemys concinna*, at the Chattahoochee Nature Center pond.

Photo courtesy of H. v. Schmeling, CNC

While Georgia has imposed harvesting restrictions for turtles in the Chattahoochee River, most freshwater turtles throughout the state have been unshielded from limitless commercial exploitation. Recently, Georgia's legislature took action, authorizing the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to regulate freshwater turtle harvesting throughout the state. DNR is currently meeting with the public to help draft the new harvesting rules. *To learn more about Georgia's turtles, see www.uga.edu/srelherp/turtles/index.htm.*

CHARLES DASHER: SOLVING PROBLEMS FOR THE RIVER

Charles Dasher likes solving problems. When he decided to donate his time and expertise to making an **iPhone App** for UCR, he was interested in making it easier to report possible water quality problems to UCR's Technical Programs Director, who happens to be Jason Ulseth, Charles's brother-in-law!

"I could see what barriers it presents for someone to go home and turn on their computer in order to report a problem," says Charles. So, he created a Report a Problem feature that allows people to communicate what they're seeing in the field through the app, select the type of problem, and email a photo with GPS coordinates automatically included.

Charles brought an impressive background in telecommunications to this project. Since 2002 he has worked in the "advance prototypes group" (a fancy name for R&D) for the Swedish company Ericsson, whose products power most of the world's telecommunications networks. Last December, Charles received **Ericsson's Multimedia Innovation Award** by winning a contest in which he competed against 90,000 other employees worldwide.

While keeping his day job and raising two children with his wife Lori, Charles also managed to launch his own start-up company, **Adascent**, in 2009. Under the aegis of Adascent, Charles has created iPhone Apps for UCR and

for SweetWater Brewing Company (see www.adascent.com).

Love of Water Runs in the Family

The UCR project allowed Charles to combine his love of technology and problem-solving with his love of water. As a young boy, Charles enjoyed his father's sail boat on Lake Lanier, experiencing, as he puts it, "just you and the water and the wind." His affection for water grew from there and was a major theme in his wedding celebration on the island of Tobego. Charles's Bachelor Party? A day of fishing. Their wedding day began with a snorkeling outing for the wedding party.

Charles and Lori live in Lawrenceville with their daughter Ayla, a first grader, and son Wyatt, who at the age of five has a burgeoning hockey career. *To find out more about UCR's iPhone App and its cool features, go to www.ucriverkeeper.org/iphone.*



Charles Dasher and his daughter Ayla on Lake Lanier.

River Matters

For more information about these and many other river-related events, visit www.chattahoochee.org/calendar

November 5-7

Hemlock Fest
Dahlonega, GA

November 6

Upper Chatt. Chapter of Trout Unlimited's "Autumn on the River" Party
Roswell, GA

November 7

UCR's Annual Member Celebration
Location TBA

November 12

Adopt-A-Stream Workshop
Hall County

November 14-17

National Trails Symposium
Chattanooga, TN

December 10

Captain Planet's 20th Birthday Benefit
Georgia Aquarium, Atlanta, GA

GIVE THE GIFT OF CLEAN WATER THIS HOLIDAY!

Thanksgiving and the winter holidays are almost here! As gift-giving season draws near, consider a gift that can make a difference now and for future generations. Individual gift memberships in UCR are \$25 and include a card to be sent to the recipient. Let us represent your concerns about access to plentiful, clean drinking water, safe recreation opportunities, and protection of wildlife. *For more information contact Becca Klein at 404-352-9828 or at bklein@ucriverkeeper.org.*

BILL CRAWFORD CELEBRATES 10 YEARS WITH UCR!



Bill driving UCR's pontoon boat, the Molly B.

Bill Crawford, UCR's **Business Manager**, marked his tenth anniversary with the organization in August, and we celebrated his many contributions, such as his successful management of our finances which helped us achieve a "4-Star" Rating from Charity Navigator. Much more than just a bookkeeper, Bill was an integral part of the early development of our water quality monitoring programs, including BacteriALERT (see cover story). In fact, he was one of the first to pull samples from the river at Paces Ferry Bridge, where our program continues today.

Bill also was one of the creators of our annual river race and festival, which saw its eighth year in June. The race, which has been steadily growing in participation, is not only an important fundraising event, but is also a great way to get people out on the water and to bring new members to the organization. Thank you, Bill, for all you do for the river and for UCR!

UCR HONORS RAY ANDERSON, "RADICAL INDUSTRIALIST," AT PATRON DINNER

On Friday, September 24, UCR members, supporters, guests and honorees gathered at the Georgia Aquarium for UCR's 16th Annual Patron Appreciation Dinner. The highlight of the evening was the presentation of our prestigious River Guardian Award to **Ray Anderson and Interface, Inc.**, by former Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin.

Due to Mr. Anderson's leadership, Interface became the first industrial firm committed to sustainable practice. In accepting the award, Mr. Anderson called on those present "to say to the institution of business: 'You think you cannot afford to act responsibly; but here's the truth: You can no longer afford not to act responsibly; stop your companies' crimes against nature, for we, *we* will run you out of business if you don't.'"

UCR also honored the **Georgia Institute of Technology** with our first River Sustainability Award for the school's significant investment in, and leadership on behalf of, water and energy efficiency as exemplified by campus sustainability programs.



Alexandra Cousteau

Photo courtesy of Spark St. Jude/MagicOnFilm

Representatives **Debbie Buckner** and **Doug McKillip** each received the River Legislator Award for their extraordinary efforts to protect Georgia's waterways during the 2010 legislative session. Special guest **Alexandra Cousteau** also spoke about her inspiring work as a global water advocate and her current project, Expedition Blue Planet.

This very special evening netted \$110,000 for UCR's work to protect the Chattahoochee River and its watershed.

Thank You Sponsors!

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River Defender

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Pictured left to right: Dianne Dillon-Ridgley, Sally Bethea, Mayor Shirley Franklin, Ray Anderson, Laura Turner Seydel and Rutherford Seydel.

Photo courtesy of Spark St. Jude/MagicOnFilm

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If you prefer to receive RiverCHAT electronically, contact Mary Harrison at mharrison@ucriverkeeper.org

POPULAR PADDLE SERIES COMPLETES THIRD SEASON

Paddling is great exercise; it's relaxing; and it can be adventurous. As with our river cleanups, we've also found that paddling with a group leads to a sense of "river community," offers opportunities to learn about watershed values, and sometimes results in finding river problems—for the UCR staff to resolve! But when it comes down to the essential reason why people paddle... it's because it's FUN!

After three years of hosting our River Discovery Series, in partnership with the **National Park Service (NPS)**, we've provided all of the above! The Series consists of five trips totaling 37 miles and running through the **Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area** from Buford Dam to Paces Mill. For each segment, an NPS ranger acquaints paddlers with the key features of that part of the river.

In 2010, 150 paddlers enjoyed our River Discover Series; we also offered five other paddle trips and eight paddle cleanups for a total of 18 trips on the water! We will be hosting the Series as well as other paddle outings in 2011, but you don't have to wait until then to get on the water. There are plenty of outfitters along the Chattahoochee ready to assist you in your paddle adventure. *To learn more about UCR's paddle trips, go to www.ucriverkeeper.org/paddle-trips.php or check out the Georgia Canoeing Association website at www.gapaddle.com.*



Happy paddles on the 5th River Discovery trip of 2010, travelling from Jones Bridge to Island Ford.