

January 8, 2020

HEALTH OFFICIALS IN HAMILTON, MADISON, SUWANNEE COUNTIES ADVISE OF WASTEWATER CONTAMINATION IN THE WITHLACOOCHEE AND PART OF SUWANNEE RIVERS



Impacts from Valdosta, GA Wastewater Overflow

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Withlacoochee and Suwannee Rivers in Madison, Hamilton and Suwannee Counties,

Florida – The Florida Department of Health had issued a health advisory to residents and visitors near the Withlacoochee River and part of the Suwannee River in North Florida on December 9, 2019 based on the information available at that time. The city of Valdosta, Georgia reported a spill of 7.5 million gallons of untreated sewage, starting on December 3; the spillage impacted water quality of Sugar Creek. The spill is traveling 1.5 miles north in Sugar Creek to reach the Withlacoochee, and then over 30 miles to the Florida Border. The flow has been slower than expected due to the low amount of recent rainfall and the advisory was lifted as all river samples in Florida have been good. Recent testing shows more of the release has moved into the Withlacoochee River in Florida. The contaminated water will enter the Suwannee River. Therefore, the advisory for the Suwannee River will be from where the Withlacoochee River connects, down to CR 250.

People in the area are urged to take precautions when in contact with the Withlacoochee and noted part of the Suwannee Rivers. The Florida Department of Health, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the Suwannee River Water Management District are continuing to monitor the situation and will continue conducting water sampling until the water is good. The advisory will be in place for a period of time because of the flow of both rivers.

Water contaminated with wastewater overflow presents several health risks to humans. Untreated human sewage with microbes could cause gastrointestinal issues and other conditions.

Anyone who comes into contact with the river water should wash thoroughly, especially before eating or drinking. Children and older adults, as well as people with weakened immune systems, are particularly vulnerable to disease, so every precaution should be taken if in contact with the river water.

For information pertaining to the spill, contact the Valdosta Utilities Department Environmental Manager, Scott Fowler, at 229-259-3592 or sfowler@valdostacity.com.

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