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WWALS is an IRS 501(c)(3)  
nonprofit charity est. June 2012

*WWALS Watershed Coalition  
advocates for conservation and  
stewardship of the Withlacoochee,  
Willacoochee, Alapaha, Little, Santa  
Fe, and Suwannee River watersheds  
in south Georgia and north Florida  
through education, awareness,  
environmental monitoring, and  
citizen activities.*

*Suwannee RIVERKEEPER® is a  
program and a paid staff position of  
WWALS.*



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Three weeks to comment on GA-EPD Valdosta wastewater Consent Order

Hahira, GA, May 4, 2020 — May 27th is the deadline to comment on the Enforcement Order the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GA-EPD) finally issued on Valdosta for sewage spills. For decades, Valdosta has spilled wastewater into the Withlacoochee River. People downstream, even on the Suwannee River all the way to the Gulf, worry about fishing, swimming, or even boating and some even say their wells are contaminated by fecal bacteria from these spills. Many had hoped that Valdosta's big spills were over in 2016 with the new Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment Plant uphill out of the flood plain, plus a Force Main with two Pump Stations. Valdosta says it has spent about \$80 million on water system improvements. Yet the spills continued. The Order also reveals a massive fish kill.

“The December 2019 spill was the biggest yet, with no rain, and nothing actually broke. It was a massive failure of supervision,” said Suwannee Riverkeeper John S. Quarterman. “Citizens and elected and appointed officials in Georgia and a dozen counties in Florida demanded something be done.”

This Enforcement Order includes the most popular request, a fine, plus many requirements for management and technology.

“Well, I'm glad they are doing the enforcement order, requiring them to get the fixes in place,” said Deanna Mericle of Hamilton County, Florida, who was among the WWALS members who met with the City of Valdosta back in 2015 about these same sewage issues. She added, “I'm not sure what the \$122,000 will be used for, but the fine seems small. I just want the problem fixed for good if possible.”

The Order addresses much (but not all) of what Suwannee Riverkeeper asked GA-EPD to do: <http://wwals.net/?p=50979> For example, it requires the City to test water quality all the way down to the state line. One thing it does not include is any requirements for reimbursing downstream well and river testing expenses.

“It's good to see that the EPD is FINALLY taking this issue seriously!” said Suzy Hall, WWALS Testing Committee Chair. “I can't help but feel WWALS' diligence in testing has been a big part of this action, and must continue regardless of any order for the City to conduct testing.”

The entire 93-page Order is on the WWALS website, here:

<http://wwals.net/pictures/2020-04-13--ga-epd-vld-enforcement-order>

“This Order has been a long time coming. It includes an outline of a sad history of mistakes and neglect. I hope the Order will finally get the City's attention,” said Dr. Tom Potter, WWALS Science Committee Chair and taxpayer of the City of Valdosta.

### Send your comments by Wednesday, May 27, 2020, to:

Mr. Lewis Hays  
Manager, Watershed Compliance  
Environmental Protection Division  
2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE, Suite 1152 East  
Atlanta, GA 30334  
[Lewis.Hays@dnr.ga.gov](mailto:Lewis.Hays@dnr.ga.gov)  
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**About WWALS:** Founded in June 2012, WWALS Watershed Coalition, Inc. (WWALS) advocates for conservation and stewardship of the Withlacoochee, Willacoochee, Alapaha, Little, Santa Fe, and Suwannee River watersheds in south Georgia and north Florida through education, awareness, environmental monitoring, and citizen activities. John S. Quarterman is the **Suwannee Riverkeeper®**, which is a staff position and a project of WWALS as the member of Waterkeeper® Alliance for the Suwannee River Basin.

**Contact:** John S. Quarterman, Suwannee Riverkeeper  
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**Photo 1:** Site where sewage flowed out of manhole into Sugar Creek. Sugar Creek is immediately behind manhole. Photograph taken by Don Harrison.

