

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Earth Day Cleanup Postponed due to pandemic: WWALS, Georgia Power, Valdosta, and Brooks County, GA, Madison County, FL

Hahira, Georgia, March 19, 2020 — We are postponing the Earth Day Cleanup and Paddle previously scheduled for April 18, 2020, at Knights Ferry Boat Ramp on the Withlacoochee River. <http://wwals.net/?p=51816> The organizers, WWALS, Georgia Power, Valdosta, and Brooks County, Georgia, remain committed to holding this event in the future, as does , and Madison County, Florida. Meanwhile, WWALS plans a virtual outing by livestreaming a few people at the site on the original day, six feet apart, of course.



PO Box 88, Hahira, GA 31632
850-290-2350

wwalswatershed@gmail.com
www.wwals.net

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

Mission: 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.



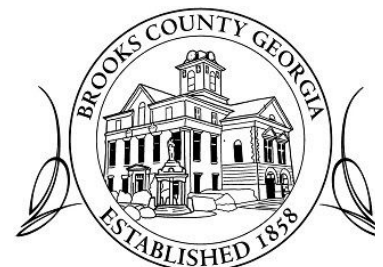
"At Georgia Power our focus during this challenging time is to ensure uninterrupted power so you can keep your daily life running," said Joe Brownlee, Southwest Region Director for Georgia Power. "We are currently taking preventive measures to keep our teams healthy as spring storm season approaches. Hopefully we'll be past this soon and can again join in fun times on the river."



"The City of Valdosta remains committed to this cleanup event and its partnership with Georgia Power and our area Suwannee Riverkeeper and will work with all to find an agreeable date down the road," said Valdosta Mayor Scott James Matheson.



"We are looking forward to a later date for this cleanup and paddle, so we can assist with promoting the event on our Brooks County FB page, and to recruit some participation to represent us," said Jessica J. McKinney, Brooks County, Georgia, Administrator.



"Madison County has postponed our river cleanup until a later date," said Madison County,

Florida, Chairman Donnie Waldrep, Sr., referring to a cleanup planned for that same day in Madison County on the Withlacoochee River. He added, "I'd love to see this be an annual event."



229 SW Pinckney Street, Madison, FL 32340

Madison County, Florida
Board of County Commissioners



"Joe and Scott and I already discussed on the radio last week that we probably could not do the paddle part of this event, due to the shuttle requiring crowding people into a few vehicles. <http://wwals.net/?p=51877> While a cleanup might be possible by simply keeping everybody spread out, we'd rather be safe than sorry," said Suwannee Riverkeeper John S. Quarterman. "Before that, we had already announced that WWALS had pulled out of three festivals, <http://wwals.net/?p=51882> each of which within a few days cancelled completely, including the largest, Azalea Festival in Valdosta. WWALS prefers to be proactive, so we think this postponement of the Earth Day Cleanup is a good step for now."



The immediate cause of postponement is that all Citizens of Georgia Power events are cancelled through at least the end of April, due to the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Also, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends [cancelling gatherings of more than 10 people](#), Valdosta has [cancelled its City Council meeting](#), Lowndes County has [cancelled its County Commission meeting](#), Brooks County [recommends avoiding County buildings](#), and even the [Lowndes County Board of Health meeting is cancelled](#). Madison County, Florida, [is making many operational changes](#) including moving to teleconference meetings. Suwannee County reminds us all that [this is not a hurricane, so don't hoard supplies](#). Most of the above are just for the next two weeks, but nobody knows how long will be necessary. More cancellations and postponements, including jury trials and grand juries, are in an announcement yesterday from Lowndes County and Valdosta, which also has good recommendations, including only share virus advice if you know where it comes from.

Citizens
of Georgia Power

<https://www.valdostacity.com/news/local-governments-issue-march-18-covid-19-update>

"I or somebody from the WWALS Outings Committee plan to be at Knights Ferry Boat Ramp on the originally scheduled day of April 18, livestreaming what we see there," said WWALS Outings Chair Bobby McKenzie. "If we can't do group outings right now, we can still try to motivate people to come out later to get out on our rivers and leave them cleaner than we found them."

"Recent bacterial results indicate we may be able to take down [our Caution signs for bacterial levels](#) before then, said WWALS Testing Committee Chair Suzy Hall.

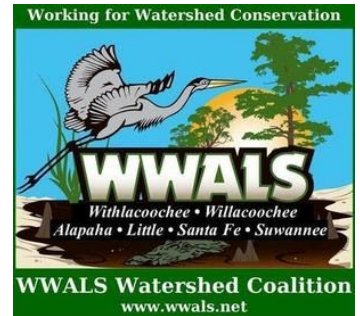
<http://wwals.net/?p=51938> "Thanks to WWALS and other testing by the city of Valdosta,

Lowndes County, and three Florida agencies, now we have a better idea of when our rivers are clean and when they are not, although more testing is needed, especially in Florida. <http://wwals.net/?p=51920> We are making progress on finding the recent sources of contamination, and no, they're not Valdosta, and probably not Quitman.”

Both Knights Ferry and Nankin Boat Ramps are on the [WWALS Withlacoochee and Little River Water Trail](#), with two dozen landings on two tea-colored blackwater rivers in two states. Thanks to Lowndes County Public Works for the water trail road signs in Lowndes County.

“Maybe all this publicity about Knights Ferry will help convince people to stop stealing our signs!” said WWALS Water Trails Committee Chair Dan Phillips. “We will reprint and replant our [pair of metal Water Trail signs at Knights Ferry](#) before the original date of the cleanup.”

“On our website we have a new online store and a kayak raffle, as well as many opportunities to sponsor WWALS events, water trail signs, and brochures, or water quality test kits, or to become a member,” said WWALS Executive Director Gretchen Quarterman. “We hope our outings and advocacy benefit you, and materials and advocacy and staff time cost money, so maybe you would like to help,”



Contact: Bobby McKenzie, 808-445-4503, chevy752001@yahoo.com

Ashlyn Johnson, Valdosta Public Information Officer,
ajohnson@valdostacity.com
229-251-4779
www.valdostacity.com

John S. Quarterman, Suwannee Riverkeeper®
WWALS Watershed Coalition
www.wwals.net
contact@suwanneeriverkeeper.org
850-290-2350
229-242-0102
PO Box 88, Hahira, GA 31632

===