



[Merrilee Malwitz-Jipson and Kristen Rubin](#) of Our Santa Fe River (OSFR) at Middle and Lower Suwannee River and Withlacoochee River Task Force, 2019-02-28

Attachment D: Credit Where Credit Is Due

While we like to think WWALS has played a central role, straddling the GA-FL line, so many other individuals and organizations did much work that we can name only a few more here.

Back on February 5, 2019, [Merrilee Malwitz-Jipson asked FDEP](#) to test for DNA markers and chemical tracers such as sucralose. WWALS assisted by publishing her request and FDEP’s answer, which said FDEP had monitored for sucralose in 2012 and 2015. She and WWALS and others continued asking. FDEP decided to do those tests, with very useful results thus far.

Unfortunately, FDEP’s answer to Merrilee also included this:

“Under Chapters 514 and 381, Florida Statutes, FDOH has jurisdiction to issue public health advisories, but they do not allow for enforcement actions directed at the source of sanitary sewer overflows, nor for routine water quality surveillance for sources of river water contamination.”



Middle and Lower Suwannee River and Withlacoochee River Task Force passing a Resolution about Valdosta wastewater, [2019-02-28](#)

So there is more work to be done in the Florida legislature, to authorize and fund regular, frequent, closely-spaced river water quality monitoring, and to detect sources of contamination.

On [February 28, 2019](#), a dozen downstream Florida counties, banded together in the Middle and Lower Suwannee River and Withlacoochee River Task Force “to address the issue of raw sewage spills by the City of Valdosta into the Withlacoochee River and Mud Creek”, passed a [Resolution](#) requesting meaningful enforcement action by the state of Georgia and Florida state agencies. They asked Valdosta to meet with the Task Force. Valdosta initially refused. So delegates from all dozen counties planned to speak for three minutes each in the March 21, 2019, Valdosta City Council Regular Session. Before then, Valdosta agreed to meet with the Task Force on April 10, 2019. The Task Force [presented the Resolution](#), and quarterly meetings were scheduled.



FL state Sen. Montford in Madison about Valdosta sewage [2020-01-08](#)

Florida State Senator Bill Montford scheduled a [Workshop on Valdosta Sewage Spills for March 20, 2019](#), as Chair of the [Committee on Environment and Natural Resources](#). It was very useful but inconclusive, because of the state line. This was not the first such meeting, and not the last.

On [January 8, 2020](#), [Sen. Montford held a meeting in Madison, FL](#), attended by members of the Task Force, the Madison BOCC, Florida state representatives Chuck Brannan and Jason Shoaf, staffers from Congressman Al Lawson and U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, and personnel from FDEP, FDOH, SRWMD, and U.S. EPA. GA-EPD declined to attend, either in person or by telephone. Task Force Chair Rick Davis read a letter requesting assistance.



Florida Task Force meeting with Valdosta City Council, [2020-01-08](#)

Later that same day, [the Task Force met with the Valdosta City Council](#). Tom Mirti of SRWMD revealed to Valdosta that a wave of contamination was moving downstream right then. Many opinions and personal stories were heard from both states. Suwannee County Commissioner Don Hale said the initial report he got from Valdosta about the December spill didn’t mention any creek, so he told people the spill did not get into waterways, and “I had crap on my face.”

Incoming Valdosta Mayor Scott James Matheson asked everyone to attend the Mayor’s Paddle organized by WWALS, [which went well on January 18, 2020](#), with people from the Task Force and SRWMD paddling. Thanks to Scott James for introducing us to Joe Brownlee, new Southwest District Director of Georgia Power, which just provided [a generous grant](#) to WWALS for testing.



James McBrayer tells SRWMD Board his well in Hamilton Co., FL, has E. coli, he thinks from the Withlacoochee River, [2019-02-12](#)

Thanks to Madison and Hamilton Counties, Florida, for allocating funds for river and well testing, and to Lowndes County, GA, Health Department for free well tests. Thanks to Valdosta Public Information Officer Ashlyn Johnson for publishing Valdosta’s thrice-weekly test results online in time to advise boaters, swimmers, and fishers.

Special thanks to the staff of GA-EPD for a [Consent Order](#) issued without anybody suing.

Inside WWALS, the entire [Board](#), the [Testing Committee](#), Chair Suzy Hall, and the [Science Committee](#), Chair Dr. Tom Potter, are instrumental and essential in our work on this matter.

Photos: John S. Quarterman for WWALS.