

Atkinson County Board of Commissioners

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June 23, 2021

EPD.Comments@dnr.ga.gov
Elizabeth Booth, Environmental Protection Division
Watershed Protection Branch
Watershed Planning & Monitoring Program
Suite 1152 East, 2 Martin Luther King, Jr., Dr., Atlanta, GA 30334

RE: Georgia Triennial Review of Water Quality Standards

- It has been brought to our attention that WWALS Watershed Coalition, Inc. (WWALS) has requested an upgrade from Fishing to Recreational in GA EPD's designated use of the Alapaha River. This Recreational designation would set higher water quality standards for this river. Atkinson County is in favor of that redesignation, applied uniformly, year-round. It really speaks to Atkinson County that all nine of the state's Riverkeepers have proposed this progressive change, and we give our entire support to such a feat.

Atkinson County is defined by the Willacoochee and Alapaha Rivers on the west and the Satilla River on the east. The Alapaha River provides public opportunities for canoeing, boating, kayaking, overnight camping, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and education. The Alapaha River is mentioned in the Comprehensive Plan of Atkinson County, Pearson, and Willacoochee as a local and regional recreational, economic, and conservation asset. Due to the recent completion of the Alapaha River Water Trail, Atkinson County's Willacoochee Landing will be placed in the Ecotourism brochure and website through the Southern Georgia Regional Commission as well.

The **Alapaha River Water Trail (ARWT)** is a "blue trail" organized by WWALS. <https://wwals.net/maps/alapaha-water-trail/>

Atkinson County passed a resolution in support of the ARWT on January 18, 2018. <https://wwals.net/?p=41301>

Willacoochee Landing is the name that resolution gave the one Atkinson County public access point to the Alapaha River, at GA 135. <https://wwals.net/maps/alapaha-water-trail/arwt-map/arwt-access/#willacoochee-landing>

Willacoochee Landing is a very popular swimming spot. While people swim there year-round (it can be 80 degrees in January), the summer it is especially popular. Despite some unfortunate recent law enforcement expenses related to Willacoochee Landing, the County has not had to spend much money on it. That is the beauty of river swimming; it does not require much investment. It is also quite common for people to get out of their boats and swim at any point in the river—not just at specific locations.

WWALS is now **testing water quality** at Willacoochee Landing weekly, and so far, all results have been below 126 cfu/100 mL. WWALS also sometimes tests downstream at Lakeland Boat Ramp at GA 122, where results have been