

<https://wwals.net/?p=53765> We know it was bad as far down as FL 6, because Valdosta and WWALS are testing on the Withlacoochee River upstream, and Madison Health is testing from the state line to FL 6. But we have no test data downstream from that time period, even though we do have a report of visibly contaminated water at Running Springs a few days after the Quitman spill.

We speculate that the Quitman sewage may have reached the Gulf, because the Quitman episode is similar to another contamination episode a month earlier, which SRWMD estimated would reach the Gulf in a similar timeframe. <https://wwals.net/?p=51780> That March 2020 episode was apparently caused by cattle manure runoff.

In general, FDEP and SRWMD stopped testing downstream of FL 6 a few months after the record Valdosta sewage spill of December 2019. This lack of testing means many contamination episodes may go undetected, especially as they reach different stretches of the rivers. FDEP appears to test reactively after a spill, but this April Quitman spill did not appear in the GA-EPD Sewage Spills Report until days after it occurred, by which time the contamination was probably already well down the Suwannee River.

<https://wwals.net/issues/vww/ga-spills/>

The March 2020 contamination episode that SRWMD estimated would reach the Gulf had no sewage spill report, because it apparently originated with non-point-source cattle manure runoff. We knew about both episodes shortly after they happened, because of testing by Valdosta, WWALS, and Madison Health.

In the March episode, SRWMD tested at three Suwannee River locations downstream from the Withlacoochee River Confluence. For the April Quitman spill, we can only speculate what happened downstream of FL 6.

Reactive testing is sometimes useful, but regular, closely-spaced, frequent testing is much more useful, as Valdosta and Madison Health have demonstrated. If we had that on the Suwannee River, everyone would have a much better idea how far the Quitman sewage actually went.

WWALS tries to warn swimmers, boaters, and fishers about river contamination episodes, both by posting reports on social media, and through the internationally-used smartphone app Swim Guide.

<https://www.theswimguide.org/search/?q=withlacoochee> For any of that to be useful, we need current and ongoing data.

If the City of Valdosta can test for fecal bacteria three times a week over forty river miles all the way to the GA-FL line, and if the small-population County of Madison can test three locations twice a week, the great state of Florida can test thrice-weekly from the state line to the Gulf of Mexico.

For more on the subject of testing, please see “Current Situation of Water Quality Testing, Suwannee River Basin 2020-08-02,” <https://wwals.net/?p=53260>

See also “WWALS Summary of FDEP chemical and biological tracers, Withlacoochee and Suwannee Rivers 2020-08-05,” <https://wwals.net/?p=53340> We thank FDEP for the chemical tracers and DNA markers, which were instrumental in indicating that much of the recent contamination has been from cattle, which in turn has been instrumental in getting cooperation from some of the cattle owners. We ask FDEP to do more such testing.

I believe all dozen Florida counties of the Middle and Lower Suwannee River and Withlacoochee River Task Force have made similar requests for testing, to their legislative delegations and to FDEP. I have copied the Task Force’s Executive Director, Scott R. Koons, who can answer questions on their request far better than I.

For the rivers and the aquifer,

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