

LAKE WATCHER

The Newsletter of Lake Watch of Lake Martin

No. 56, January 2021

by Eric Reutebuch

2020 Achievements:

- **31 sites monitored for water chemistry and bacteria in the Lake Martin Watershed**
- **Added 5 watershed monitoring sites above the lake to assess poultry expansion's impact**
- **302 data records submitted to the AWW water quality database**
- **Lobbied vigorously with community partners for strengthening CAFO regulations, particularly for poultry**

Lake Watch Officers*:

Eric Reutebuch...President
Matt Campbell...Vice-president
Dianna Porter.....Secretary
Janne Debes.....Treasurer

LW Board of Directors:

Joanne Walker Dick Bronson
Myrna Lehman Laurie Barrett
Tom Collier Jesse Cunningham
Bill Butler

(*Lake Watch officers also serve on board)

Letter from the President

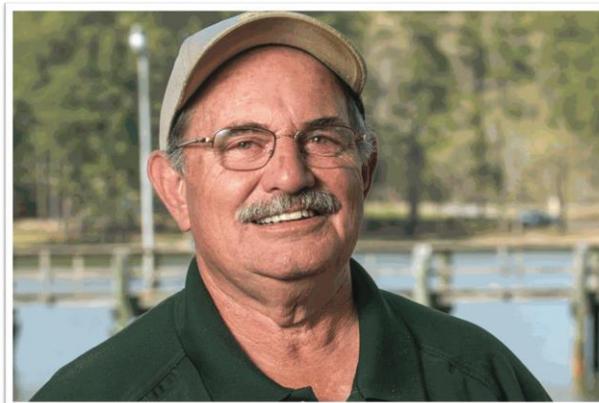
It goes without saying that 2020 was a very challenging year! I hope and pray that all of you and your families made it through safely! In spite of the pandemic, it was a busy and challenging year for Lake Watch after our annual meeting on February 23, 2020. The meeting went well.

We were pleased to award Zelma and Raymond DePasquale the 2020 Woodfin Martin Award in appreciation for their many efforts in environmental education at Radney Elementary, conducting Living Streams at Camp ASCCA and Birmingham, their long-time water monitoring efforts, and service on the Lake Watch Board of Directors. Congratulations Zelma and Raymond!

The 2020 Bronson Environmental Stewardship was awarded to Bruce Adams, Superintendent of Wind Creek State Park for his support and participation in the annual Lake Martin Renew Our Rivers Cleanup; his support of a bacteria testing program at the park's public swimming beach conducted by Auburn scientists and Lake Watch volunteers in an effort to evaluate risks from bacteria for swimmers (the tests indicated no areas for concern at the Wind Creek State Park beach); his support to include the State Park's swimming beach in an



international database called *Swim Guide*; and his collaboration with Lake Watch in the construction of an environmental education kiosk promoting lake stewardship efforts. Mr. Adams has been a strong advocate of environmental protection, especially for the park and Lake Martin, an environmental educator to thousands, and a partner in many Lake Watch stewardship efforts. Congratulations Mr. Adams!



Source: Lake Magazine

We were pleased to have Lance LeFleur, Director, Alabama Department of Environmental Management, as our speaker at our last annual meeting. Director LeFleur and Richard Hulcher informed us on ADEM's regulation of poultry production, which is greatly expanding in the Middle Tallapoosa Basin just above the lake. **I consider the expansion of poultry farms above the lake to be the most significant potential threat to our lake's water quality.** Aside from our routine monthly monitoring, the poultry expansion and regulation issue consumed most of our efforts in 2020.

At that time (February 2020), we had a couple of sample results from our above-lake bacteriological monitoring program that was initiated by Matt Campbell in the fall of 2019, and is ongoing. Those samples did not indicate any high *E. coli* coming down the three monitored streams: Crooked, Emuckfaw, and Timbergut, that were selected to sample because of the significant numbers of poultry farms in their watersheds. One caveat – there were no significant rain events during these early sample runs.

We continued sampling, adding Hillabee Creek in August of last year, specifically during and immediately after rain events. We tried to target significant rain events that covered the whole Middle Tallapoosa Watershed (where the four streams flow through and then drain into the Tallapoosa River, which drains into the lake). That made a BIG difference. We started seeing *E. coli* contamination in **thousands** per 100 milliliters of water (about a half-cup of water). It makes sense for the high bacteria counts to occur directly following a significant rain event since that's when chicken manure (litter) is washed off the landscape and into nearby streams, assuming you get enough rain. The chicken litter is typically spread on fields as fertilizer – it is a good fertilizer and it adds organic matter to the soil improving soil texture. But, when it is flushed into streams, it causes bacterial contamination (*E. coli*, *Salmonella*, etc.), unwanted nutrient enrichment (increases algae blooms), and organic matter contamination (which can deplete dissolved oxygen when it decomposes in the water).

In addition to the watershed monitoring, our monitors continue to diligently test sites throughout the lake. This is not only crucial for detecting any negative impacts from pollutants coming from the watershed down the Tallapoosa River, but also crucial for detecting impacts from potential sources from streams that flow directly into the lake (Coley, Elkahatchee, Dennis, Blue, etc.). See **Water Monitoring** below for more details on Lake Watch results for 2020.

Our other main activity last year was addressing the proposed changes in ADEM's Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) regulations. CAFO regulations include regulations over the

ever-expanding poultry farms sprouting up in our watershed above the lake – thus we were both interested and concerned. See [Lake Watch Legal Committee Efforts](#) below for more details.

In closing, I am optimistic that 2021 is going to be a good productive year for Lake Watch and for our lake. I've seen a growing interest in protecting our treasured lake and hope to see a growth in our membership and watershed stewardship activities. Y'all stay safe and I hope to see you later this year!

Annual Meeting

Due to the continuing and rapid spread of the coronavirus, the Lake Watch board has decided to **postpone our annual meeting**. We will continue to monitor the spread of the virus and the rollout of the vaccine. We will plan the meeting when it is deemed safe. All, please stay safe and stay healthy.

Elections

The Lake Watch board met via Zoom on January 18, 2021 to discuss our plans for this year. We had a good meeting to discuss our goals and objectives to strengthen Lake Watch and to continue, and increase, the protection of our Treasured Lake.



We had two long-time board members retire from the board: Judy Palfrey (left picture) and Zelma DePasquale (right picture). I extend my heart-felt appreciation to Judy and Zelma for their years of service – as board members, as monitors, as teachers of the public and in schools, as monitor trainer/coordinator (Judy) and Vice President (Judy) – THANK YOU!



The Lake Watch board received a nomination for Vice President and unanimously elected MATT CAMPBELL (right picture) as our new VP! Matt and Ann have monitored for years. Matt has led our Legal Committee, and is leading the monitoring efforts in our watershed bacteriological monitoring of watershed streams above the lake. THANK YOU Matt for stepping up!



The Lake Watch board was also happy to accept Janne Debes (left picture) to a second term as Treasurer! Janne has monitored for years, has been AWW Monitor of The Year for the past couple of years, and served on our board. THANK YOU Janne for stepping up!

And THANK YOU to all of our board members for your efforts, ideas and actions in guiding our Lake Watch efforts!

Budget

Our Treasurer Janne reported to the board that for 2020 Lake Watch had fewer expenses and increased membership dues contributions. We had 126 dues-paying members. We started 2020 with \$5,032 and ended the year at \$5,768. I'd say we're in good shape with one caveat: we will have additional expenditures with our plans of increased water testing in the watershed above the lake, and particularly with running genetic sourcing tests in the watershed to identify where the *E. coli* are coming from (which animal(s) – humans, pets, wildlife, livestock, and/or poultry). Thus, all contributions are most welcome. **And a big THANK YOU to all who support Lake Watch through annual dues and donations**, especially our Silver, Gold and Platinum donors! We couldn't operate without your support!

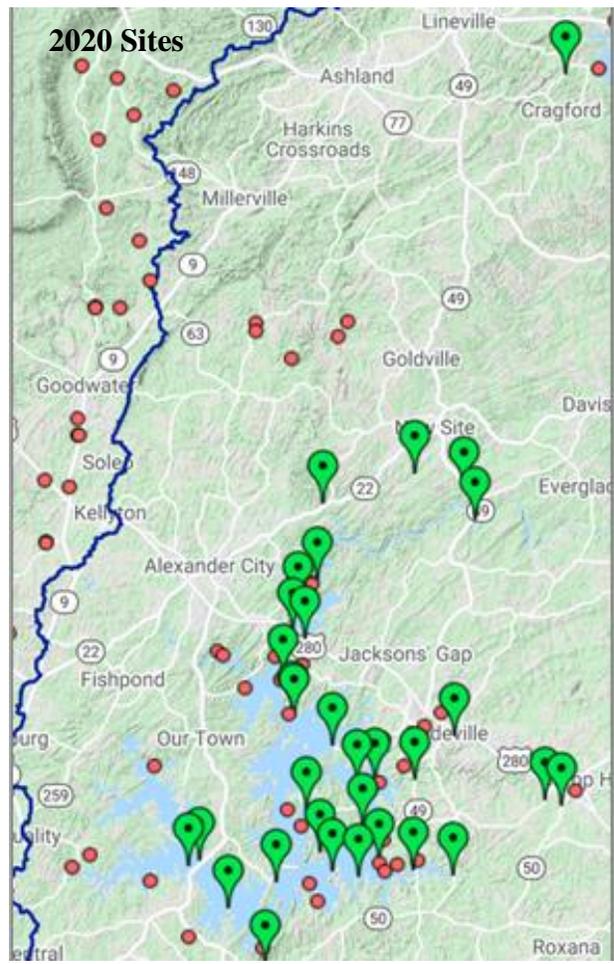
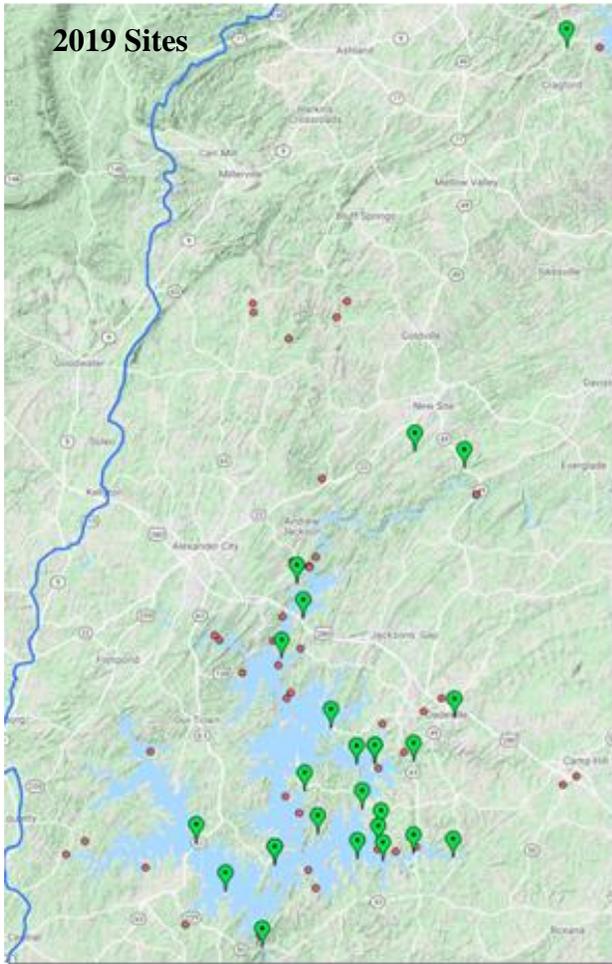
Water Monitoring

The Lake Watch volunteer water monitors continue to watch over our lake through their diligent monthly water testing. Unfortunately, Lake Watch lost eight monitors last year 😞. **We are in need of new monitors! We also need citizen water monitor trainers!** I have a list of five individuals who want to get trained as monitors – we're just waiting for a safe time to do it. If you know of anybody that you think would be interested in water monitoring – ask them, and if they're willing let me know and I'll add them to my list!

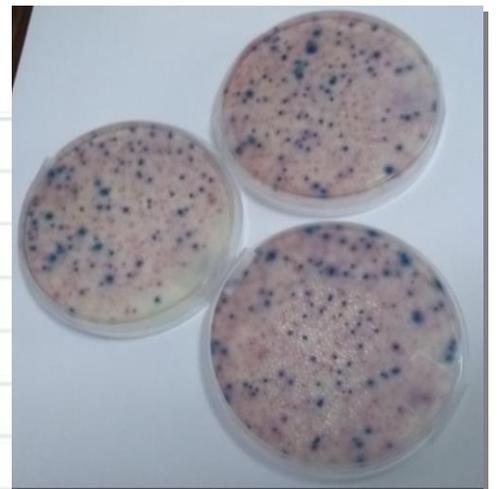
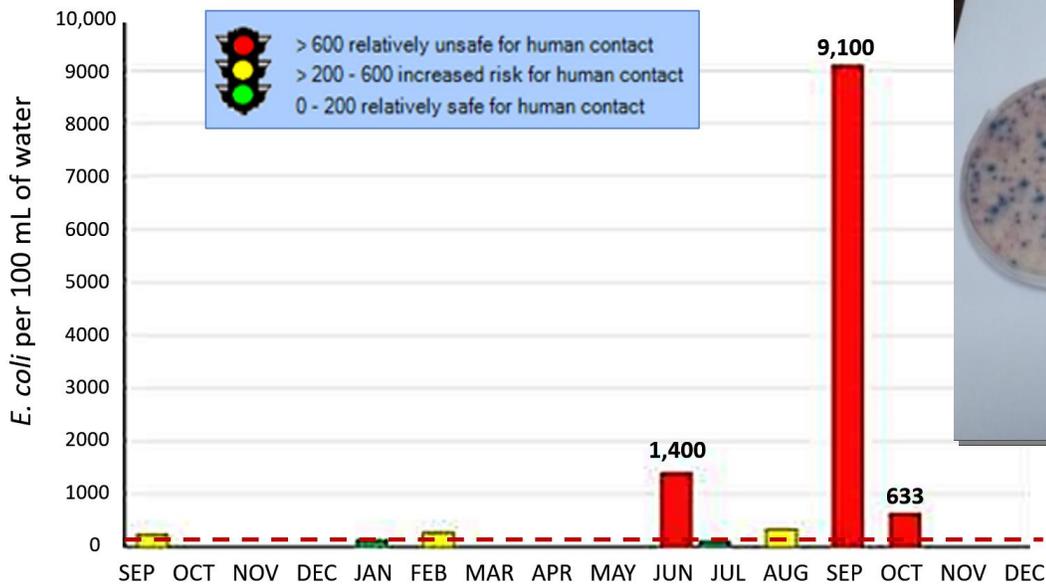
In spite of the loss of monitors, water testing actually increased in 2020! Lake Watch monitors conducting 302 water tests (192 water chemistry records and 110 bacteria records) compared to 216 total records last year. Lake Watch monitoring sites also increased from 24 to 31 sites last year (see 2019 and 2020 site maps on the next page; green=active sites, red=inactive sites), from Crooked Creek (the lake's headwaters near Lineville) down to the Martin Dam. I am happy to report that our volunteer water monitors' data showed good water quality throughout the boundaries of the lake. No violations of ADEM water quality standards were reported.

It was a different story for the streams flowing into the lake, and those flowing into the Tallapoosa River which then flows into the lake. Our watershed sampling above the lake indicated high loads of *E. coli* bacteria (indicating fecal contamination in the water) during rain event sampling. We saw this repeatedly on Crooked Creek near Lineville, Emuckfaw Creek near Horseshoe Bend and Timbergut Creek near New Site, each time we sampled during rain events. All of these streams have significant numbers of poultry houses that have popped up in their watersheds, and all drain to the river that then drains to the lake. High *E. coli* was also seen once in the Tallapoosa River at Horseshoe Bend.

Lake Watch will continue our sampling of these streams, as well as Hillabee Creek and the Tallapoosa River. Our citizens who recreate on these streams and rivers know how lovely they are, and indeed their water quality is very good to excellent, except at times of heavy rainfall and higher water levels. The high quality of the many tributary streams in our Tallapoosa Watershed must be preserved and protected against degradation.



Bacteria plates showing *E. coli* contamination (blue colonies) in Crooked Creek last October – there should be no more than 3 *E. coli* per plate to be within ADEM’s regulations, these had ~ 91 per plate! *E. coli* counts are shown graphically below. Dashed red line indicates ADEM limit of 298 *E. coli* per 100 mL of water for a single sample during the warm season.



Lake Watch submitted e-complaints to ADEM to document the high *E. coli* counts that were seen from three of the streams in the lake's watershed. This alerted ADEM to the situation as well as documented the contamination in ADEM's complaint system.

The following streams contained E. coli above ADEM's State Fish & Wildlife standard of 298 E. coli/100 mL of water (Summer standard for single sample test). Values are averages of triplicate samples using the AWW Coliscan Easygel bacteriological test:

6/10/2020 e-complaint:

Crooked Creek at Watts residence off Berwick Rd: 1,400 E. coli/100 mL

10/20/2020 e-complaint:

Crooked Creek at Watts residence off Berwick Rd: 9,100 E. coli/100 mL;

Emuckfaw Creek at HWY 49 Bridge: 2,833 E. coli/100 mL;

Timbergut Creek at Tallapoosa CR 100 Bridge: 3,067 E. coli/100 mL

We plan to continue monitoring key streams above the lake for bacteria, specifically *E. coli*, along with genetic source tracking analyses to determine the source of the fecal contamination. Sampling will focus on significant rainfall/runoff events to check for potential impacts from poultry operations near these streams.

Join me in giving a big **THANK YOU** to all of our Lake Watch volunteer monitors:

- ◆ Allen Sneed
- ◆ Bill Butler
- ◆ Matt & Ann Campbell
- ◆ Joanne Walker
- ◆ Edwin Eiswerth
- ◆ Connie Wheatley
- ◆ Mike Guillot
- ◆ Marge Johnson
- ◆ Janne Debes
- ◆ Judy Palfrey
- ◆ Eric Reutebuch
- ◆ Dianna Porter*
- ◆ John Owen*

*Pictured at right sampling at Timbergut Creek



Note that some areas of the lake still go unmonitored, particularly the tributary streams flowing directly into the lake (Coley, Elkahatchee, Dennis, Manoy, Little Kowaliga, Wind, Oakachoy, Chapman, and Parker creeks) as folks move away and long-time volunteers retire their test kits, so we are always in need of new water monitors. If you think it's a necessity to have an insurance policy for your home and your car, think the same way about your lake – insure it through your involvement and investment in lake stewardship by becoming a Lake Watch supporter, and consider becoming a water monitor. Visit the Alabama Water Watch website at

www.alabamawaterwatch.org for information on water testing and registration for free workshops held throughout the year, or email Eric at reuteem@auburn.edu.

Lake Watch Legal Committee Efforts

Lake Watch Legal Committee members had a busy year in 2020, focused on ADEM CAFO regulations. Eric submitted comments to ADEM in June of 2020. Three items were identified that we thought needed addressed in the annual 5-year CAFO regulations review:

1. lack of public visibility of pending registration for new CAFOs in the state,
2. lack of adequate vegetated stream buffers between CAFOs and streams, especially for our Treasured Alabama Lake,
3. lack of adequate inspection and enforcement of existing CAFO regulations.

ADEM sent a response letter back saying that their existing regs were adequate.

In September, it was discovered that ADEM was proposing a new set of CAFO regulations thanks to the eagle-eye of Matt Campbell. These State CAFO regulations, if approved, would allow a CAFO operator to opt out of the existing Federal CAFO regulations. The Legal Committee, under Matt's leadership, felt that the proposed State CAFO regulation option was not strong or protective enough to maintain clean water and went virtually unnoticed by the public and even environmental advocates. Very few people knew about this highly significant proposed shift in CAFO regulations, which could have a profound impact on our lake. The Legal Committee tried to get the word out to the greater Lake Martin area community, and asked that folks send letters to ADEM objecting to the change in regulations until the public was informed and the regulations were further strengthened. It was reported that ADEM received around **100 letters!**

THANKS to all of you who raised your hands in support of the lake!

THANKS to Lake Martin HOB0 and LMRA and the Alexander City Mayor and the Outlook for calling for letters to support the lake!

Well, notwithstanding those 100 letters including numerous letters from the Lake Watch President and Legal Committee, and trips to Montgomery by Matt and Jesse Cunningham, the proposed regulations were passed. For a deeper look at the results of the meeting, check out the Lake Magazine January 2021 article: *ADEM promises improved oversight of 'Treasured' waters* at: https://www.lakemagazine.life/lake_news/adem-promises-improved-oversight-of-treasured-waters/article_748dc5e2-5770-11eb-941f-c70d8fa29e9a.html .

All is not lost though! As a result of this, the Lake Martin community united like never before in support of clean water. We plan to strengthen community partnerships and strengthen stewardship of Lake Martin in the coming months.

Lake Watch Environmental Education Efforts

As you can imagine environmental education efforts were stifled last year because of the pandemic. None-the-less, efforts will resume when it is safe to once again gather with students and community members. We'll keep you posted.

Trash Cleanup

Last year's annual Renew Our Rivers (ROR) cleanup on Lake Martin has removed more than **160 tons** of trash from Lake Martin. LMRA president, John Thompson has been coordinating the lake clean up, in coordination with Alabama Power and several other



partners since 2006, along with over 2000 volunteers. Lake Watch members Ken and Tanya Holland, along with Tanya's sister Tammie McVickers and Tanya's mother, Shirley Cook extended a huge helping hand again this year, going way above and beyond the call of duty in their efforts to clean up the lake (as they've done for many years). They spend several weekends before the official cleanup collecting and bagging trash in sloughs for easy pickup during the ROR cleanup. Let's all extend a big THANK YOU to all of the ROR volunteers! Ps., can you find our two Bronson Environmental Stewardship Award winners, John Thompson, Director of LMRA, and Bruce Adams, Superintendent of Wind Creek State Park, as well as Ken and Tanya and Tammie and Shirley in the picture of volunteers above (Source: Lake Magazine).

Plans for 2021

The Lake Watch board met on Wednesday, December 16, 2020 to debrief on the December 11 meeting of the Environmental Management Commission where ADEM's proposed CAFO regulations were passed. The board discussed next steps in light of the passing of the new State CAFO regulations, which follow:

1. Have additional board members get on ADEM's notification list so we don't miss any key announcements by ADEM that pertain to Lake Martin and its watershed.
2. Try to identify the folks that took the initiative to send in letters of support for our opposition to request that they join in our 2021 efforts and work toward coalescing this group to proceed with measures to protect our lake.
3. Continue cultivating relationships with key ADEM personnel to aid in our efforts to protect the lake.
4. Request updates from ADEM personnel on ADEM water monitoring and CAFO inspections in our watershed.

5. Maintain/increase monitoring of key streams that have significant poultry production, including bacteria (*E. coli*) monitoring and also genetic source tracking analyses to identify the source(s) of fecal contamination in streams that flow into Lake Martin.
6. Develop a Fact Sheet for public outreach that clearly defines threats to the lake from CAFOs.
7. Investigate strengthening the Treasured Alabama Lake designation of Lake Martin to extend protections beyond the lake to the whole watershed, including the streams and the Tallapoosa River that drain into the lake.

We welcome all who are willing and able to help us accomplish these objectives! We need you!

We also welcome your suggestions/ideas on accomplishing these objectives and other ideas on how to better protect our lake from emerging threats.

Closing Thoughts

YOU are what makes Lake Watch of Lake Martin work! We urge each of our Lake Watch members to spread the word about Lake Watch, to support our programs and to participate. Help sign up new members to our team! Consider an additional donation to Lake Watch! Not everyone can get out and monitor water, or teach in a classroom, or give a presentation, but each member is essential to our success.

Together, we can make a difference in the protection of our lake, in water conservation and clean water advocacy, and in the world we leave for our children. If every Lake Watch member encourages one or two friends to join in our efforts, it will go a long way toward ensuring the continuation of the good work we've accomplished over the past 29 years. Go visit your neighbor and convince him or her to sign up. Signing up is easy, just go to our website, www.lakewatch.org and click the menu item 'Get Involved'.



Dues Reminder

Take the plunge, if you haven't already!

- Protect Lake Martin by supporting Lake Watch!
- And ask a neighbor to do the same!



For the many faithful Lake Watch members who already sent in their dues for 2021, THANK YOU! And for those who haven't yet, don't forget to send your check to:

P. O. Box 72, Alexander City, AL 35010

to keep your membership current. Membership levels are listed below:

Regular dues (annual): **Student \$10** **Individual \$15** **Family \$25**

Lake Martin Steward: **Silver \$50** **Gold \$100** **Platinum \$250**

We also welcome donations of any amount. Don't forget—a donation in someone's honor/memory is a lovely gift/tribute.



P. O. Box 72
Alexander City, AL 35010

