

Georgia Department of Natural Resources

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Georgia EPD Concludes Investigation Into Recent Fish Kill In The Ogeechee River

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) has concluded that drought-related conditions are the likely cause of a fish kill in east Georgia's Ogeechee River, but an exact cause will never be known.

Water samples have been analyzed and test results released today show the river is meeting water quality standards. Fewer than 100 dead fish were found last month in various stretches of the river. It has been determined the fish died of columnaris and aeromonus bacteria. Environmental stressors, such as high temperatures and low water flow, make fish more susceptible to disease. The bacteria are different from the so-called flesh-eating bacteria referenced in news reports this spring.

Flow in the Ogeechee River dropped to 60-70 cubic feet per second in May. The historical average stream flow needed to support healthy fish is 127 cubic feet per second. Water temperatures also have risen above 80 degrees Fahrenheit, which also can contribute to health problems with fish.

A major fish kill occurred in the Ogeechee River in May 2011. While a cause of that fish kill could not be determined, an EPD investigation revealed that a textile plant on the river had an unauthorized wastewater discharge. EPD took enforcement action against plant owner King America Finishing, which included a \$1 million penalty and imposed additional monitoring requirements.

Following the recent fish kill, EPD took water samples on May 24 from the river at Rocky Ford, the King America Finishing plant, U.S. highway 301, route 24, route 204 and U.S. highway 17. Lab tests were conducted for ammonia, dissolved oxygen, biological oxygen demand, chemical oxygen demand, color, conductivity, formaldehyde, pH, metals including sodium and chromium, sulfide, Total Recoverable Phenolics, Total Suspended Solids, Total Kjehldahl nitrogen, Total Phosphorus, Nitrate/Nitrite, hardness, turbidity and total coliform.

EPD also conducted an extensive inspection of the King America Finishing facility in late May. This included analysis of discharge monitoring reports, inspecting production and wastewater treatment operations and water sampling at the plant's discharge point in the river. EPD determined the plant is operating in compliance with current requirements.

Daily toxicity testing of the plant's effluent discharge and weekly toxicity testing of in-stream water is conducted and there are no indications of problems with toxicity.

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