

## Observations – Who to Call

The weather has been beautiful and we have all been out enjoying the trails, rivers and lake. While you are out and about there are multiple basic visual observations that you can be making that can help our community spot problems. Georgia Adopt-A-Stream (GA AAS) has a basic visual form that all volunteers fill out when doing their monitoring that cover many of these items. However, you do not need to be a GA AAS volunteer to be observing such things as water clarity, water color, water surface and water odor. If you observe a potential problem, it is important to contact the correct agency. It is best to contact the agency immediately because if you don't, time gets away from you and the next thing you know it has been a week or more.

Water clarity is the first observation that you can look at however many of you may ask – “What is the difference between water clarity and water color?” So we will address both here. Water clarity is looking at if the water is either clear, cloudy or opaque. Whereas, water color is either absence of color, brown, green, white, tannic (brown but clear like tea) or any other random color. “Why is this important?” It is important because unless it has rained recently we should see clear water that is absent of color. After a rain event and even days after we would expect to see opaque or cloudy brown water from stormwater runoff. Something else to take in consideration is reflection. If you are looking down into a body of water from a bridge and the bottom is majority sand, a brown color will reflect. If possible it is best to look at a water sample up close to determine the color. If the water is brown and cloudy but it hasn't rained in a week then that could indicate that there may be runoff from a construction site. Creek water that is bright blue and bright green is unnatural and though it seems crazy but it has happened in waterways in Cherokee County.

The next observation is water surface which is observing oily sheens, algae, foam and anything else abnormal. First, an oily sheen is a common observation that could be from a petroleum products or iron-oxidizing bacteria. There is a way to figure out if it natural iron-oxidizing bacteria or not. If you take a stick and disturb the oily sheen it will either break apart or it will clump back together. If it breaks apart and stays apart then it is a naturally occurring iron-oxidizing bacteria. This type of bacteria has an iridescent sheen or oily-looking slick on the surface of the water called biofilm. Another indicator of this bacteria is rust-colored material deposited on the bottom of water bodies, drains or on surrounding soils. It causes no environmental problems. Second, algae is a common observation that is natural for water bodies. It becomes a problem when you see excessive amounts that coincide with additional observations such as water color, clarity and/or odor. Next, Foam is another water surface observation and it can be either natural or an environmental concern. Natural foam accumulates in quantities on windward shores, in eddies, behind rocks and logs and in slow water. The natural foam has a somewhat earthy or fishy aroma. It is usually a dirty brown color with small bubbles and is often seen with algal scum. Natural foam is quick to dissipate and is frequently observed in the early morning hours and is gone by midday. Detergent foam, by contrast, will have a noticeable perfume-like smell from additives which give wash a "rose garden" or "lemon fresh" smell. Detergent pollution and foam will usually be localized close to the source of the discharge and have large glistening white bubbles. Natural foam is not a threat to human health, however a large amount of detergent foam is a problem. Lastly, there is an array of other water surface issues you may observe such as dead fish, sewage artifacts or trash.

Water odor is the last observation that is hard to miss unless you have a stuffy nose. Our waterbodies should have a natural smell with no distinct other odors. The distinct odors that you should be focusing on are gasoline/diesel, sewage, rotten egg, fishy, chlorine or any other chemical smell. It is sometimes difficult to be clear if you are picking up the odor from the air or water. Do not put yourself in any kind of danger trying to separate the two but if you move away from the waterway and still pick up the odor that may be an indication it is in the air. A gasoline/diesel odor could come from an illegal discharge into a stormdrain or directly into a waterbody or as a result of an accident on the roadway. Sewage has a musty smell that surprisingly is not always easy to identify. However, it could also have a rotten egg (Hydrogen Sulfide) odor. A strong fishy odor could prompt you to look for dead fish in the waterway. If you smell a strong chlorine smell someone could be draining unchlorinated pool water into a stormdrain or directly into the waterway.

A particular issue that we are concerned about is identifying sewer overflows. It is important that sewer overflows are reported promptly so that it can be resolved as quick as possible. Four easy observations to identify a sewerage overflow: 1) cloudy water 2) gray color 3) musty odor 4) artifacts. "What are sewage artifacts?" Toilet paper and all the other items people should not flush down the toilet such as cotton swabs. If you observe a potential problem, it should be reported immediately. Depending on where you are at in Cherokee County and the potential problem you will report it different places. However, if you are not certain about the jurisdiction, you can call us and we can help guide you in the right direction.

#### **Cherokee County unincorporated –**

##### **Stormwater issue –**

- Cherokee County Stormwater - 678-493-6072 or on-line complaint  
<https://www.cherokeega.com/Stormwater-Management/report-a-complaint/>

##### **Sewer issue –**

- Cherokee County Water & Sewerage Authority – 770-479-1813

##### **City of Canton (All issues) –**

- 770-720-7674 – Public Works

##### **City of Woodstock (All issues) –**

- [www.woodstockga.gov](http://www.woodstockga.gov) and on the Home Page is a link to *Citizen Request For Action*:  
<https://www.bsaonline.com/CitizensRequestForAction/Submit?uid=2504>

##### **City of Holly Springs –**

##### **Stormwater issue -**

- (770) 345-5533 or [https://hollyspringsga.us/citizen\\_request\\_center/index.php](https://hollyspringsga.us/citizen_request_center/index.php)

##### **Sewer issue –**

- Cherokee County Water & Sewerage Authority – 770-479-1813

**City of Ballground (All issues) –**

- (770) 735-2123 or <https://cityofballground.com/report-concern/>