

# Resolve to protect our Treasured Lake in 2019

I hope that you, as an avid reader of *Lake* magazine, are well acquainted with Lake Watch of Lake Martin. Lake Watch is in its 28th year of protecting our one-and-only Treasured Alabama Lake. Over these 28 years, Lake Watch volunteers have monitored 54 sites on the lake, the Tallapoosa River and many of the streams that feed into the lake, and they have submitted 2,702 data records to the statewide Alabama Water Watch database at [www.alabamawaterwatch.org](http://www.alabamawaterwatch.org).

Wow! That's a lot of data and a lot of people-hours. Lake Watch monitors test the water for nine parameters: temperature; dissolved oxygen; pH; hardness; alkalinity; turbidity; Secchi visibility; general coliform bacteria; and *E. coli* bacteria.

So how's the lake doing based on our volunteer water monitoring results?

During the past year, Lake Watch water monitors have tested 20 sites and submitted 200 records to the AWW database (155 water chemistry records and 45 bacteria records). As you might expect and hope, the vast majority of data show that Lake Martin is clean and in excellent shape, though a few of the readings do indicate a couple of problem areas. Two parameters in particular – low dissolved oxygen and the presence of *E. coli* bacteria in the water – have indicated problems in a few areas.

Low DO is a problem for fish, as they take in oxygen dissolved in the water through their gills. If DO readings fall below the state-mandated minimum of five parts per million, fish and other aquatic critters suffer and could even die.

Of the 155 water chemistry records taken over the past year by Lake Watch, only three were below five ppm. This represents 1.9 percent of all readings, meaning that



LAKE WATCH

BY ERIC REUTEBUCH

for 98 percent of the monitoring, the DO was at healthy levels. The three low readings ranged from 4.1-4.4 ppm, not low enough to kill fish but low enough to negatively impact fish health. These measurements were obtained at Lake Watch site 07001007, which is located at Smith Landing in the Sandy Creek embayment, where Sandy Creek enters the lake.

*E. coli* bacteria are considered a threat to human health when levels rise above 235 *E. coli* per 100 milliliters of water, according to the Alabama Department of Environmental

Management, the state's environmental protection agency. There were five instances when Lake Watch monitors got readings above 235 *E. coli* per 100 milliliters of water, which represents 11 percent of all bacteria readings taken over the past year. None of these high *E. coli* readings were found in the lake; all occurred at stream sites.

Four of the five readings were at Lake Watch site 07001041 in a small tributary stream of Chattasofka Creek near the Dadeville High School. Readings ranged from 333 to 600 *E. coli* per 100 milliliters, which prompted a follow-up investigation by local officials. They discovered and

removed a dead animal from the stream, and the bacterial contamination of the stream has cleared up.

The one other site where one high reading occurred – a reading of 1,900 *E. coli* per 100 milliliter (*yikes!*) – was at Lake Watch site 07001053 in Sandy Creek, upstream of the state Route 49 bridge. This very high reading was obtained in February 2018, shortly after a high rainfall/runoff event, emphasizing the recommendation from the Alabama Department of Public Health to avoid swimming in streams, rivers and embayments after



high rain events, which often are evident by the presence of muddy water.

In conclusion, the lake continues to have occasional water quality problems in the Sandy Creek embayment, relative to DO levels, but no problems with bacteria (*E. coli*) contamination. Significant *E. coli* contamination has occurred in the Chattasofka Creek watershed and occasionally in Sandy Creek (*Note: Chattasofka Creek flows into Sandy Creek*). These problems underscore the need for continued water monitoring of the lake and its tributary streams to ensure that humans, fish and other aquatic critters are not harmed, and to ensure that we maintain our Treasured Lake status.

Make one of your New Year's resolutions to help protect our Treasured Lake. Join us at [www.lakewatch.org](http://www.lakewatch.org).

You can support Lake Watch in several ways, including becoming a member; becoming a water monitor; participating in youth and/or adult environmental education activities; and/or becoming a water quality/water policy advocate. I believe that you would find your involvement to be a worthwhile and rewarding experience.

I would like to close by extending my gratitude and thanks to all of our Lake Watch volunteers for watching the water over the past two-plus decades. Your efforts have benefitted – and continue to benefit – all of us.

*Eric Reutebuch is president of Lake Watch Lake Martin. Learn more or volunteer at [www.lakewatch.org](http://www.lakewatch.org).*



Raymond DePasquale monitors water from his dock in StillWaters

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