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## Contaminated water flowed into tidal zone

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Jan 24, 2023



This photo from the fish kill report compiled by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources shows the milky water, stained by copper carbonate, as it flowed through a canal and into a tidal zone.

Provided photo

The milky, contaminated water from an industrial chemical release that killed more than 85 fish in a Glynn County canal entered tidal waters that flow into the Turtle River, a report from the state Environmental Protection Division shows.

A fish-kill report prepared by the EPD and obtained by The News said the water discolored by copper carbonate appeared to be more pronounced as the canal flowed closer to tidal areas.

“The fish kill occurred in freshwater and the closer I went to the estuary, the more it turned a milky color,” the report prepared by Jacob Coldren of the EPD said. “The flow was slow until water reached (U.S.) Hwy. 341 where it became faster due to restriction of culvert pipes and the outgoing tide.”

The presence of dead freshwater fish in the canal off of Chris Road in Sterling ceased when the canal met brackish, tidal water, the report said. Most freshwater fish do not live in salty, brackish water.

Sunbelt Forest Products reported on Dec. 27, 2022, that 500 gallons of copper carbonate, a chemical used in the wood preserving process, had spilled when a frozen pipe at the facility had burst on Dec. 26, the report said.

“Sunbelt hired a remediation company to block off the canal and pump water out of the canal into trucks to put in frac tanks,” the report said. “The remediation company also pumped water from a portion of the canal that was not contaminated with copper carbonate past the contained area to dilute any copper carbonate that may not have been contained.”

The EPD contacted Ben Ballard of Georgia Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Management on Dec. 30 to report the presence of dead fish in the canal.

None of the 89 fish killed in the 1.4-mile stretch of the canal was listed as endangered or threatened, the report said. Among the dead fish observed by the DNR and noted in the report were 76 bullhead catfish shorter than 3 inches, five bullheads longer than 8 inches, five golden shiners, two chain pickerel and one bluegill.

The total value of the fish was estimated to be a little more than \$65.

The cost of the investigation was about \$956.

The canal appeared to have no discoloring during a visit by The News on Monday, but nearby residents have reported that they have seen discolored water still flowing in recent weeks from a containment zone where the cleanup crews were working to remove the chemicals from the water. Those claims have not been substantiated by the EPD, said Sara Lips of EPD public affairs.

Residents also said they counted as many as 140 dead fish shortly after the release and saw wading birds eating the dead fish.

Local environmental advocates from the Altamaha Riverkeeper, Satilla Riverkeeper and Glynn Environmental Coalition conducted their own tests of the water shortly after the chemical release and collected samples of the dead fish to examine as well. The organizations will be meeting with residents who live near the canal this week to discuss the status of the cleanup and what they can do to test their wells, among other things.

The EPD said about 10 days after the chemical release that it did not expect the spill to affect public or private groundwater wells and that residents near the canal should stay out of the water along Chris Road and Ga. 99 until the cleanup is complete.

“Our emergency response team continues working with Sunbelt toward completion of the remediation which at this stage consists mainly of sampling and awaiting results,” Lips said.

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