

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OGEECHEE RIVERKEEPER, CITY OF SAVANNAH HOST THIRD RAIN BARREL GIVEAWAY

Effort is part of a long-term project to improve the health of the Vernon watershed

Ogeechee Riverkeeper (ORK) and the City of Savannah Water Resources Department are partnering to lead a long term project to protect the water quality and ecology of the Vernon River. As part of that effort, ORK and the City are holding their third rain barrel giveaway at Daffin Park on Thursday, May 4, 2023. Area residents can pick up a free rain barrel from 5 - 7 p.m. in the sandy parking lot behind the stadium. Barrels are limited and will be given away on a first-come, first-served basis.

In 2021, ORK the City of Savannah, and other stakeholders set out to restore the waterways in the Vernon River basin to the point that it can be delisted as an impaired waterbody by GA EPD; and to reduce the amount of litter and plastic pollution entering the waterways. The canals and tributaries that feed the Vernon River are highly impacted by urban development.

“All of Savannah’s stormwater infrastructure flows into a public waterway,” says Laura Walker, [Water Resources Environmental Manager](#) for the City of Savannah. “We work hard every day to try and keep them fishable and swimmable. But we need everyone to treat the storm system with care. We need everyone to protect the storm drains, ditches, and creeks and keep them clean.”

The barrels collect rainwater for later use. They can also mitigate flash flooding by slowing water runoff from roofs. The Vernon River receives a significant amount of the stormwater leaving the City of Savannah, all part of the Ogeechee River watershed. The goal of the project is to improve water quality, restore ecological habitat, and “Protect The Vernon” from current and future threats.

Another way ORK and the City have partners is to deploy litter booms in an effort to catch litter before it reaches the river or the ocean. The booms were installed in the Coffee Bluff, Chippewa, Wilshire, and Harmon Canals. These traps are cleaned out regularly and the litter is sorted, analyzed, cataloged and then recycled or disposed of responsibly. Since February 2022, the litter booms have caught nearly 2,500 lbs of trash. The most common material is polystyrene, with an average of 370 pieces per cleanup.

The booms were designed and installed by Osprey Initiative, and were paid for by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). ORK received the [5 Star grant from NFWF](#) for its comprehensive plan involving multiple stakeholders in the area.

“We are so grateful for the broad group of stakeholders working with us to minimize the threats that urban runoff, and litter and plastic pollution pose to this special waterbody,” says Damon Mullis, riverkeeper and executive director. “As the NFWF grant comes to a close this summer, we will be

releasing the updated watershed management plan for the Vernon River. This represents hundreds of hours of sampling, analyzing, cleaning, mapping, counting and more.”

Sign up to volunteer, view data, watch an installation video, and view the successes to date:

<https://www.ogeecheeriverkeeper.org/vernon>

What: Rain barrel giveaway with ORK and City of Savannah

Where: Daffin Park

When: May 4, 2023, 5-7 p.m.

About Ogeechee Riverkeeper: Ogeechee Riverkeeper 501(c)(3) works to protect, preserve, and improve the water quality of the Ogeechee River basin, which includes all of the streams flowing out to Ossabaw Sound and St. Catherine’s Sound. The Canoochee River is about 108 miles long and the Ogeechee River itself is approximately 245 miles long. The Ogeechee River system drains more than 5,500 square miles across 21 counties in Georgia. More at ogeecheeriverkeeper.org.