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## State Acknowledges Need for Better Public Notification of Sewage Spills

### *State Denied Water Groups' Petition, But Will Conduct Study to Improve Public Notification*

Montgomery, AL— Today, Alabama's Environmental Management Commission ("EMC") voted to deny a statewide petition filed by nine water protection groups to initiate rulemaking to require better public notification of sewage spills and overflows. In doing so, the EMC announced plans to study the issue and consider rulemaking at a later date to improve public notification of sewage spills.

"We are disappointed the EMC did not accept our petition and quickly begin reforming Alabama's public notification regulations for sewage spills, given that water use season is upon us," Black Warrior Riverkeeper Nelson Brooke commented. "However, we are pleased the EMC agrees Alabama needs better public notification regulations. We will work with the EMC in crafting public notification rules to guide necessary public notice, which will ensure nobody is unknowingly swimming, fishing and recreating in sewage."

Alabama Rivers Alliance, Black Warrior Riverkeeper, Cahaba Riverkeeper, Choctawhatchee Riverkeeper, Coosa Riverkeeper, Friends of Hurricane Creek, Little River Waterkeeper, Mobile Baykeeper, and Tennessee Riverkeeper submitted the petition, which was publicly supported by dozens of other conservation and recreation groups.

Recent high profile events, like a major sewage overflow in Northport which put up to 4,000,000 gallons of sewage into the Black Warrior River right before the busy July 4, 2016 weekend, highlighted this pressing problem and prompted the petition. Public concern has grown significantly in recent weeks with widespread media coverage of the petition as well as an interactive map the groups released showing 2016 sewage spills. In only two weeks that online map has been viewed over 32,000 times.

Although wastewater treatment plants are required by Alabama law to "immediately" notify the public of sewage spills, presently there are no regulations which specify a time, plan or even a bare minimum level of notification.

According to Black Warrior Riverkeeper Staff Attorney Eva Dillard, "The objective of the petition was to ensure a uniform, consistent minimum standard of sewage spill notification across the State, to reach the maximum number of people possible. We are pleased that the EMC plans to address this critical public health and safety issue. We look forward to working with them and other stakeholders to fix public notification in Alabama. "

For a copy of the petition, [click here](#).

To see the 2016 interactive sewage spill map to check out where spills occur in your community, [click here](#).

For Nelson Brooke's high resolution photo of sewage flowing from a Birmingham manhole, entering a nearby storm drain, and eventually ending up in Village Creek, [click here](#).

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Black Warrior Riverkeeper is a citizen-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to protect and restore the Black Warrior River and its tributaries. We are advocates for clean water, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities throughout the Black Warrior River watershed. To learn about the river and threats to it, visit [BlackWarriorRiver.org](http://BlackWarriorRiver.org).