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Guardians of the Etowah River Watershed

I reside in the most flourishing county in Northwest Georgia, Cherokee County. Most of this county falls under the Etowah River Watershed of the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa (ACT) River Basin, which is in central North Georgia just above Atlanta. Amazingly, it encompasses different areas in five counties: Dawson, Lumpkin, Forsyth, Pickens, and Cherokee. This watershed is unique and serves as a habitat and home to many plants and animals.

The history of this watershed is incredible! The Etowah River Watershed extends 163 miles into Northwest Georgia and remarkably supports 76 native fish species in its murky waters. According to the Upper Etowah River Alliance, “The Upper Etowah River Watershed is home to four unique fish: the Etowah Darter, two species of Holiday Darter, and the Cherokee Darter. The Etowah, Cherokee, and the two species of Holiday darters are endemic, meaning the only place in the world they are found is in the Etowah Watershed.” This explains to me that many different unique animals live in this habitat. If we do not take care of this basin, then these distinctive species will not survive and will go extinct. We are lucky to have such animals inhabiting our watersheds and basins. To keep these special animals alive and thriving in this watershed, we must take action and care for their habitat, the Etowah River Watershed.

Unfortunately, our watershed is suffering from pollution, a lack of dissolved oxygen, and many more fatal challenges that affect its ecosystem's cleanliness and safety for its plants and animals to thrive. Our beautiful water basin is our responsibility. There are numerous things that we, as a community, can do to prevent pollution, water wastage, and the introduction of toxic chemicals into the Etowah River Basin and other basins. As a community, we should protect our basin by conserving water every day, taking shorter showers, fixing leaks, and turning off the water when not in use. Additionally, we should avoid pouring toxic household chemicals down the drain and instead take them to a hazardous waste center. Using hardy plants that require little

or no watering, and refraining from using harmful fertilizers or pesticides in your yard can also contribute to a healthier ecosystem. These solutions could lead to better health for us and for our community's watersheds.

Another amazing fact: Did you know that the water from the Etowah River Basin and other basins is the water you drink and bathe in? Yes, the Etowah River Basin is a primary source of drinking water for many surrounding counties. Furthermore, we need to keep our basins and watersheds clean so that we humans can stay healthy, and the wildlife in the Etowah River Watershed can also thrive. This clean watershed is essential for a healthier future.