



Georgia Water Coalition names “Dirty Dozen” exposing the 12 worst offenses to Georgia’s water

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Individual contacts for each site on the dirty dozen list are available at:
www.garivers.org/gawater/dirtydozen.htm

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 11-14-12 – Today, Georgia’s leading water protection group named its “Dirty Dozen” for 2012, exposing the worst offenses to Georgia’s water. The sites range from an unnecessary reservoir in northeast Georgia to a tire dump in southwest Georgia.

The Georgia Water Coalition is a consortium of 175 conservation and environmental organizations, hunting and fishing groups, businesses, and faith-based organizations that have been working to protect Georgia’s water since 2002. Collectively, these organizations represent more than 300,000 Georgians.

“This list not only highlights some of the most egregious water pollution problems in our state, but also calls attention to state policies that harm our rivers and waste our tax dollars,” said April Ingle, executive director at Georgia River Network. “The sites on this list are examples of Georgia’s failures to protect our water, our fish and wildlife and our communities.”

Topping the list for the second year in a row is the Ogeechee River where a textile manufacturing plant’s toxic discharge led to the death of some 38,000 fish in May 2011. A hazardous waste site adjacent to Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, Glades Reservoir proposed near Gainesville, a Flint River groundwater injection experiment near Albany, Richland Creek Reservoir proposed in Paulding County and Rayonier’s pulp mill in Jesup round out the top six.

Minimum flow requirements on the Chattahoochee in Atlanta ranked seventh on the list, followed by a century-old navigational cut through the Satilla River salt marsh, a landfill with ties to Gov. Nathan Deal in Gainesville, Tired Creek Reservoir proposed near Cairo, the expansion of the Vogtle Nuclear Power Plant on the Savannah River and a tire dump in Cuthbert.

The Coalition's full report details the history of each site and provides solutions to correct these ongoing pollution problems and eliminate the listed threats. It is available online at: <http://www.garivers.org/gawater/dirtydozen.htm>.

The Coalition faults continuing funding cuts to Georgia's Environmental Protection Division (EPD), political cronyism at the highest levels of state government and the wasteful use of state tax dollars as the primary causes of these ongoing threats to our state's streams, rivers, lakes and coastal areas.

EPD has seen its funding cut by 44 percent and staff cut by 23 percent (250 positions) since 2008, seriously jeopardizing its ability to enforce the state's environmental laws.

Even more problematic, said the Coalition, is the cronyism that puts campaign contributors and their business interests on the Governor-appointed Department of Natural Resources Board, which oversees EPD—the agency that regulates those same businesses.

Board members who have spoken up for the protection of waterways have been systematically removed from the board and replaced with political cronies. Of the 16 members currently serving, 11 have ties to entities that EPD regulates. Even the current Director of EPD, a political appointee of Gov. Nathan Deal, previously served as a lobbyist for a firm that represents industry and business groups.

“The Deal Administration's appointments and actions suggest that enforcing environmental laws are not a priority,” said Joe Cook, Executive Director & Riverkeeper with the Rome-based Coosa River Basin Initiative. “Track the money divvied out in Gov. Deal's new water supply program and you get further clarity about this administration's priorities and allegiances.”

In August, the Deal administration directed \$102 million in state dollars to reservoirs and water supply projects of dubious need, including some \$9 million in state “investments” that directly benefited businesses and individuals that were major donors to his gubernatorial campaign, according to the Coalition.

At the same time, state funding for lower cost projects to maximize existing water supplies has languished.

“The \$102 million that Gov. Deal directed to questionable and environmentally destructive water supply projects this year is more than three times the \$30 million in state dollars invested by the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority in water conservation and efficiency projects from 2006-2010,” said Sally Bethea, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper.

The Dirty Dozen list was compiled by the Coalition after taking nominations from member groups across the state. This is the second such list. While four issues from the 2011 Dirty Dozen made return appearances this year, other issues did not return to the list this year because they were resolved; still others continue to threaten our water. Updates of the 2011 Dirty Dozen are included in the full report which can be viewed at: <http://www.garivers.org/gawater/dirtydozen.htm>.

The 2012 list includes:

1. Ogeechee River: One Year After The Largest Fish Kill in State History, Pollution Continues

In May 2011, after five years of King America Finishing Co. (KAF) illegally dumping toxic substances into the Ogeechee River, some 38,000 fish died—the largest known fish kill in Georgia’s history. With funding for its Emergency Response Team gutted, it took Georgia’s Environmental Protection Division (EPD) days to respond to this tragedy and warn the public. And, it took almost a month for EPD to instruct the company to stop the dumping. More than a year later, the impacts of the fish kill are still rippling through Ogeechee communities. Long-time river users no longer fish the river, riverfront property values have declined and the Ogeechee fishery is still recovering--despite a state-financed re-stocking program. Meanwhile, KAF has still not been held accountable, and the Ogeechee Riverkeeper has had to file legal appeals to force EPD to follow the law and clean up the mess.

2. South River: Chronic Looting of Hazardous Waste Trust Fund by Legislators Leaves Hazardous Waste Site Cleanup for Another Day

Each year, some 90 million people course through Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport; what those visitors don’t know is that a stone’s throw from the airport’s runways is a site so polluted with heavy metals and other hazardous substances that Georgia’s Environmental Protection Division (EPD) has placed it on the state’s Hazardous Site Inventory. A toxic stew linked to brain damage and reproductive dysfunction in humans is contaminating groundwater and potentially leaking into the South River watershed. What’s worse, there’s no money to pay for a cleanup because, during the past eight years, Georgia’s General Assembly has looted state funds. Since 2004, legislators have taken \$86.5 million paid by taxpayers, local governments and businesses, that is supposed to fix messes like this site, and used those funds to pay for other parts of the state budget. Statewide, there are 560 sites similar to this site threatening public health and the environment.

3. Flat Creek: Boondoggle Reservoir Project Threatens Lake Lanier, Chattahoochee River and Downstream Communities

The Chattahoochee River supplies drinking water to nearly four million people in metro Atlanta. For decades, the river has been the center of a water dispute between Georgia, Alabama and Florida. The Chattahoochee has suffered from extreme droughts while serving as ground zero in the ongoing conflict over water use in the Apalachicola-

Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) basin. These events have fueled Georgia's misguided strategy to circumvent federal control over the Chattahoochee by damming its tributaries. The most glaring example of this strategy is Hall County's proposed \$95 million Glades Reservoir on Flat Creek which flows into the Chattahoochee River and Lake Lanier. This project would divert and impound water that would otherwise fill Lake Lanier, interfering with federal management of the lake and complicating efforts to reach a water sharing agreement with Alabama and Florida. While local support for the project has waned recently, Gov. Deal has indicated that he might come to the rescue with state funds to prop up the floundering project.

4. Flint River: Governor's Water Supply Program Invests in Boondoggles Instead of Water Supply

When Nathan Deal became Governor in 2011 he created the \$300 million Governor's Water Supply Program (GWSP) to fund "critical, cost-effective" projects that will provide "an adequate supply of clean and affordable water" for communities in need. In August 2012, the Deal Administration released the first \$102 million in this program. The bulk of the money went to reservoir projects of dubious need and to businesses and individuals that were supporters of Deal's gubernatorial campaign. Two projects proposed by Deal supporters received \$9 million in direct state investment (funds not requiring reimbursement to the state), including an experimental groundwater injection experiment on the Flint River and a well for Lake Lanier Islands Development Authority, a private resort and water park. Neither project could be considered critical or cost effective. In fact, the Flint River project could ultimately cost \$1.2 billion.

5. Richland Creek: Unnecessary Reservoir Wastes Tax Dollars, Threatens Downstream Communities, Endangered Fish

The proposed Richland Creek reservoir in metro Atlanta's Paulding County is symptomatic of Georgia's rush to "secure water supplies" at the expense of common sense and state and local tax dollars. While lower cost alternatives exist to secure future water supplies, local leaders, supported by Gov. Nathan Deal's water supply program, are promoting an unnecessary \$85 million project that threatens downstream water users and a population of federally protected fish that are only found in the Etowah River basin—and nowhere else in the world. The project, which was awarded a \$29 million loan from Gov. Deal's water supply program in August, is being built for the Paulding County water system which currently cannot account for 25 percent of the water that it purchases from a neighboring water system due to leaky pipes and metering problems.

6. Altamaha River: Rayonier Pulp Mill Continues to Foul Georgia's Little Amazon

No. 2 on the 2011 Dirty Dozen list, Rayonier's pollution of the Altamaha River makes a return appearance because little has changed on Georgia's largest river. The river remains fouled for miles as the pulp mill's discharge turns the river black and pulpy and leaves it smelling rancid. White sandbars are still stained brown. Fishermen still catch seemingly healthy fish only to find them reeking of nauseating pulp mill odors when

they begin to clean them. After inclusion on the Dirty Dozen list in 2011, EPD, after six years of inaction, finally requested that Rayonier apply for a renewed wastewater discharge permit. In 2011, Rayonier boasted earnings of \$264 million while its stockholders reaped a 32 percent return from dividends and stock price gains. Yet, the company still has not invested adequately to fix its foul discharge.

7. Chattahoochee River: State Fails to Ensure Minimum Flows at Atlanta

Twice in 2012, Bull Sluice Lake, a reservoir on the Chattahoochee River formed by Morgan Falls Dam near Atlanta, nearly disappeared, stranding boaters on mudflats. The sudden drop in Bull Sluice's elevation was the result of a communication glitch between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), which operates Lake Lanier's Buford Dam upstream, and Georgia Power Co., which operates Morgan Falls Dam. As a result of the glitch, Chattahoochee River flows below Buford and Morgan Falls dams dipped to unprecedented lows with unknown water quality consequences, underscoring an ongoing problem on the river: the lack of timely flow and water quality monitoring. For more than three decades, EPD has relied on a minimum flow to dilute the wastewater discharges from Metro Atlanta's sewer plants, but has never provided monitoring to assure minimum flows were achieved. Nor has the state agency conducted studies to determine if the minimum flow is adequate to protect the drinking water source for 73 percent of metro Atlanta's population. No. 4 on last year's Dirty Dozen list, the Chattahoochee returns this year because of limited progress to address this ongoing need.

8. Satilla River: Army Corps of Engineers Action Needed to Restore Fisheries in Coastal Waters

In the early 20th century, a half-mile channel was dug through Georgia's coastal marshlands for the purposes of moving timber to market via river barges on Dover Creek and the Satilla River. A century later the lumberjacks are gone, but the channel known as Noyes Cut remains, wreaking havoc on migrating fish, blue crabs and boating routes near the mouth of the Satilla River. Today, filling in the obsolete timber barge route could result in restoration of striped bass, herring, eel and shad migrations in Camden County's coastal creeks and the Satilla River while improving routes for recreational boaters. Despite the fact that a Corps' study recommended the closing of Noyes Cut in the 1980s, to date, no action has been taken to correct this century-old problem.

9. Allen Creek: Politically-Connected Landfill Operators Threaten Streams, Minority Community

On the south side of Gainesville in Hall County, the predominantly minority community of Newtown has fought for more than half a century to protect their homes, health and property values from harmful industrial pollution. Today, they face the proposed expansion of a landfill that processes food waste, biosolids and sewage sludge. Already, nearby residents say that odor from the facility is so unbearable that children, at times, cannot play outside. Promoted by politically-powerful individuals with ties to Gov.

Nathan Deal, expansion of the Gainesville Waste and Recycling (GWAR) landfill poses a serious threat to Allen Creek and the Oconee River and to the health of families in Newtown. This site is an example of the hundreds of industrial operations statewide that are not fully complying with pollution regulations to stop the flow of bacteria, excess nutrients, toxic substances and other contaminants into Georgia's waterways.

10. Tired Creek: Unnecessary Fishing Lake Puts Taxpayers on the Hook, Threatens Downstream Communities

Since the 1930s, state and federal authorities have proposed multiple plans for a park and lake on Tired Creek near Cairo. All have failed to materialize—due to lack of funding and a lack of need. But, Grady County officials have been undaunted. When Georgia's Department of Natural Resources questioned the need for an additional fishing lake just 25 miles from the large-mouth bass hotbed of Lake Seminole, county leaders pushed forward. Their latest proposal will destroy more than 300 acres of wetlands and nine miles of streams and will alter flows on the Ochlockonee River. It will also put county taxpayers on the hook for at least \$15 million. The County's flawed angler demand study, used to justify the lake's need, included infants and toddlers in its calculations for potential anglers, yet the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2010 approved the project—and without any meaningful regulations on development around the proposed public reservoir.

11. Savannah River: Two New Nuclear Reactors Threaten Health of Savannah River, Needlessly Waste Limited Water Supplies

Along Georgia's rivers, you'll find 17 fossil-fuel-fired and nuclear-powered electric generation facilities. Water pumped from our rivers is critical in the power generation process as it is used to cool operating systems and keep electricity flowing to our homes, businesses, industries and farms. In fact, more water is pumped from Georgia's water bodies to produce electricity than is removed for any other use—nearly fifty percent of Georgia's total water use. These facilities permanently remove about 187 million gallons a day (MGD) from Georgia's rivers—enough water to supply the cities of Augusta, Savannah, Columbus, Macon, Albany and Rome. Now, the Southern Company wants to add to that drawdown on Georgia's rivers by building two new nuclear reactors at Plant Vogtle on the Savannah River. Though new and safe technologies exist that would require less water, Southern Company plans to rely on water-intensive cooling systems for these reactors.

12. Patchila Creek: Georgia Legislators Loot Trust Funds for Cleanup of Tire Dumps, Leaving their Hometown Communities at Risk

As Georgia citizens, every time we purchase new tires for our vehicles, we pay a \$1 per tire fee to the state to ensure proper disposal and recycling of our scrap tires. In place since 1990, these fees deposited in the state's Solid Waste Trust Fund have helped our state clean up illegal and abandoned landfills, tire piles, and dumps. Unfortunately, during the past eight years, the Georgia General Assembly has looted \$32 million from the Solid Waste Trust Fund, leaving tire dumps scattered across the state, posing a risk

to public health and the environment. Such is the case in Southwest Georgia where some 150,000 tires sit at the Randolph County Transfer Station in Cuthbert awaiting proper disposal and recycling. Collecting water, the tires are breeding grounds for disease-carrying mosquitoes. Meanwhile the risk of fire is always present—a catastrophe that could release toxic fumes into the air and release contamination into creeks feeding Patchila Creek.

INDIVIDUAL CONTACTS FOR EACH SITE ON THE DIRTY DOZEN LIST ARE AVAILABLE AT <http://www.garivers.org/gawater/dirtydozen.htm>