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DIRTY DOZEN LIST 2016: DIRTY ENERGY PRODUCTION POLLUTES GEORGIA'S WATER

For Immediate Release - November 16, 2016: Today, Georgia's leading water coalition named its "Dirty Dozen" for 2016, highlighting 12 of the worst offenses to Georgia's waters. The annual Dirty Dozen shines a spotlight on threats to Georgia's water resources. It also highlights the polluters and state policies or failures that threaten the health and safety of Georgia's waters.

"This year's report highlights the real, human costs of dirty energy production in Georgia's communities," said Joe Cook, Advocacy and Communication Coordinator for Coosa River Basin Initiative. "Toxic chemicals from coal plants are showing up in groundwater wells and in our rivers while risky proposals for transporting and extracting gas and oil threaten water supplies, wildlife and property rights."

For instance, residents across the state are concerned about the safe disposal of the pollution left behind at coal-fired power plants. In Milledgeville, Lake Sinclair is on the receiving end of toxic coal ash wastewater from Georgia Power Co.'s retired Plant Branch. In Jesup and Juliette, toxins associated with coal ash have shown up in groundwater. Despite these threats, the state's recently adopted coal ash regulations will only require testing of groundwater twice a year at the many facilities storing coal ash.

"Groundwater supplies about 20 percent of the state's drinking water," said Emily Markesteyn Kurilla, Ogeechee Riverkeeper. "For such an important resource, the government has not been serious in protecting it. Our legislators let existing protections lapse, and they have failed to address existing pollution of wells. It's past time to protect this important water supply."

Other pollution issues and water supply problems associated with risky energy production are highlighted in the report. A proposed nuclear power plant in South Georgia is included because it will permanently remove millions of gallons of water from the already over-stressed Chattahoochee River.

In Southwest Georgia, a federal agency gave a private company the right of eminent domain to build a natural gas pipeline to deliver the commodity to Florida power companies. The pipeline poses a threat to the region's drinking water while providing no benefits to Georgia residents.

And, in Northwest Georgia the potential for natural gas exploration and the use of fracking techniques has residents worried about their well water. Georgia's 40-year-old oil and gas drilling law does not adequately protect residents from the risks associated with modern drilling techniques.

“I do not feel that my property, or our community's water resources, are adequately protected by Georgia's existing laws,” said Kiki Edmonds, Floyd County resident. “Many people in rural areas are not eligible for city water. Those families rely on well water for drinking, cooking, bathing, cleaning, and crop irrigation. I believe the protection of groundwater is my biggest concern. I'm also worried about our rivers and streams, our landscape, damage to our already worn county roads, air pollution, and, of course, the threat of earthquakes like we're seeing in Oklahoma.”

The remaining issues run the gamut, from chronic sewage overflows that threaten the health of DeKalb County residents to a proposed rocket launching facility in Camden County that could harm tourism on the coast's famed Cumberland Island. From government's failure to enforce stream protections to legislative deception that takes money from important clean community programs, the issues outlined in this report represent an opportunity for Georgia's 10 million residents and its leaders to take action to ensure the state's future generations have enough clean water to grow and prosper.

Coalition members encourage Georgians to speak out on these issues by sharing the report on social media, signing petitions and sending emails. Concerned residents can visit www.protectgeorgia.org to learn more and take action.

“Our families' and communities' futures are at risk,” said Jennette Gayer, director of Environment Georgia. “We can be part of the solution by speaking out and asking our officials to protect our water.”

The Coalition's full report details the history of each site and provides solutions to correct these ongoing problems and eliminate the listed threats. The full report—including updates from previous Dirty Dozen reports—is available online: <http://gawater.press/2016-Dirty-Dozen>

The problems highlighted in the report include:

- Georgia's Well Water: Coal Ash Disposal at Landfill Threatens Well Water (JESUP)
- Coosa River: Outdated Regulations Allow Coal-fired Power Plant To Dump Toxins in River (ROME)
- Northwest Georgia's Drinking Water: Fracking for Natural Gas Fraught With Dangers Under Georgia's Outdated Regulations (ROME, CALHOUN, DALTON)
- Chattahoochee River: \$99 Million Nuclear Power Plant Study Squeezes Ratepayers, Water and Clean Energy (GEORGETOWN, COLUMBUS, BAINBRIDGE)
- Georgia's Groundwater: While Toxins Seep Into Our Well Water, Protections Remain Lax (JULIETTE, MACON)
- Georgia's Coast: Oil Exploration Threatens Coastal Tourism, Devastates Wildlife (SAVANNAH, BRUNSWICK)
- Lake Sinclair: Future of Coal Ash Ponds Looms Over Oconee River Lake (MILLEDGEVILLE)
- Chattahoochee, Flint, Withlacoochee Rivers and Floridan Aquifer: Gas pipeline company, federal agency run roughshod over state, local residents property rights (ALBANY)
- South River: DeKalb County's Aging Sewers Pollute Urban River (ATLANTA)
- Cumberland Island National Seashore: Camden County Rocket Launching Project Threatens Coast, Historic Barrier Island (ST. MARY'S)
- Georgia's Rivers, Stream and Lakes: Agency Charged With Protecting State's Water Thwarts Legislators' Efforts To Protect All Georgia Waterways with Natural Buffer (STATEWIDE)
- Georgia's Public Health: Legislators Steal Funds Intended for Cleanup of Toxic Sites, Mosquito-breeding Tire Dumps (STATEWIDE)

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The Georgia Water Coalition is a consortium of 235 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 250,000 Georgians.

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