



DIRTY DOZEN 2017: Dirty Energy, Dirty Politics Top List

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For more information about specific Dirty Dozen sites view the report at:

For Immediate Release Nov. 14, 2017: Today, Georgia’s leading water advocacy organizations released their “Dirty Dozen” for 2017 in a 28-page report highlighting 12 of the worst offenses to Georgia’s waters (<https://www.gawater.org/resources/dirty-dozen>).

The seventh annual Dirty Dozen report shines a spotlight on threats to Georgia’s water and highlights the polluters and the policies or failures that threaten the health and safety of Georgia’s waters. High on this year’s list are rollbacks to clean water protections that benefit the polluters at the cost of Georgians—a recurring theme since the first Dirty Dozen report was released in 2011.

“This report shows how changing policy in Washington, D.C. is having real pollution impacts in Georgia communities,” said Joe Cook, Advocacy and Communication Coordinator for the Coosa River Basin Initiative in Rome. “Couple those changes with continued lackluster funding for state clean water programs, and you have a one-two punch that, if not a knock out, has some of our rivers and lakes on the ropes.”

After bowing to pressure from energy lobbyists, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has delayed new rules limiting pollution from coal-fired power plants. This delay directly affects the health of Georgia’s waterways and allows toxins like mercury, lead, arsenic and selenium to continue to be dumped into Georgia waterways.

Likewise, the EPA’s decision to redefine what water bodies are protected under the Clean Water Act could leave thousands of miles of Georgia’s streams and thousands of acres of wetlands with no protections.

Meanwhile, at the state level, funding for Georgia’s Environmental Protection Division (EPD), the state agency charged with enforcing clean water laws, remains poor. Since 2005, EPD has seen its appropriations fall while state revenues have grown. Adjusted for inflation, Georgia's 2017 revenue was \$3.3 billion more than in 2005, yet in 2017 EPD received almost 25 percent less support from the lawmakers than it did in 2005.

This underfunding has resulted in prolonged delays to cleanup the Coosa River near Rome as well as other water bodies while also hampering the cleanup of hundreds of hazardous waste sites and illegal tire dumps across the state.

And, all too often, the state defends big business rather than protecting ordinary citizens from pollution. On the Altamaha River, despite court rulings asking EPD to fix noxious pollution coming from the Rayonier Advanced Materials facility in Jesup, the state agency continues to defend its actions and the multinational corporation.

“All Georgians deserve better,” said Jen Hilburn, Altamaha Riverkeeper. “We and other Georgia Water Coalition members should not have to file lawsuits to get our state to enforce clean water laws, but too often through lack of funding or lack of political will, EPD fails to protect us and our water.”

Issues highlighted in the Dirty Dozen report include:

- Altamaha River: Pulp mill pollution continues, EPD defends polluter. (Jesup/Wayne County)
- Coosa River: U.S. EPA halts clean water rules for power plants to keep toxic discharges flowing into the river. (Rome/Floyd County)
- Coosa River: Lack of funding leads to failure to conduct pollution studies and delays river cleanup plan. (Rome/Floyd County)
- Georgia’s Public Health: Legislators divert funds intended for clean community programs. (Statewide)
- Georgia’s Streams and Rivers: Legislators stall action to protect vulnerable Georgia streams. (Statewide)
- Georgia’s Well Water: Disposal of coal ash at ill-suited municipal landfills threatens drinking water. (Statewide)
- Georgia’s Wetlands: U.S. EPA efforts to gut clean water act leave streams, wetlands without protections. (Statewide)
- Lake Sinclair: Coal ash pond cleanups send toxins into popular reservoir. (Milledgeville/Baldwin, Putnam, Hancock counties)
- Savannah River: Natural gas facility poses risk to Savannah, U.S. energy independence. (Savannah/Chatham County)
- Savannah River: Risky nuclear boondoggle harms rivers, ratepayers and taxpayers. (Waynesboro/Burke County)
- Terry Creek: Toxic cleanup plan leaves Brunswick residents at risk. (Brunswick, Glynn County)
- Whitewater Creek: Private reservoir proposal tries to tap into state dollars. (Butler, Oglethorpe and Montezuma/Taylor and Macon counties)

The full Dirty Dozen report and individual contacts for each item listed above are available online: <https://www.gawater.org/resources/dirty-dozen>

The Georgia Water Coalition is a consortium of more than 240 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.

