

# 2017's Worst Offenses Against GEORGIA'S WATER

## GEORGIA WATER COALITION'S DIRTY DOZEN

### A Call to Action

From rollbacks to federal protections for Georgia's water and public health to lackluster state funding for clean water programs, the Georgia Water Coalition's (GWC) 7th annual Dirty Dozen report exposes the worst offenses and greatest threats to Georgia's water and its people.

This year's report takes aim at both state and federal governments where policy decisions and failure to adequately fund environmental programs are leading to polluted rivers and lakes and compromising the health of Georgians.

At the federal level, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) decision to delay new rules limiting pollution dumped in rivers at coal-fired power plants means that toxins like mercury, lead, arsenic and selenium will continue to be released into Georgia waterways.

EPA has also taken aim at re-writing Clean Water Act rules, a move that could leave thousands of miles of Georgia's streams and thousands of acres of wetlands with no protections.

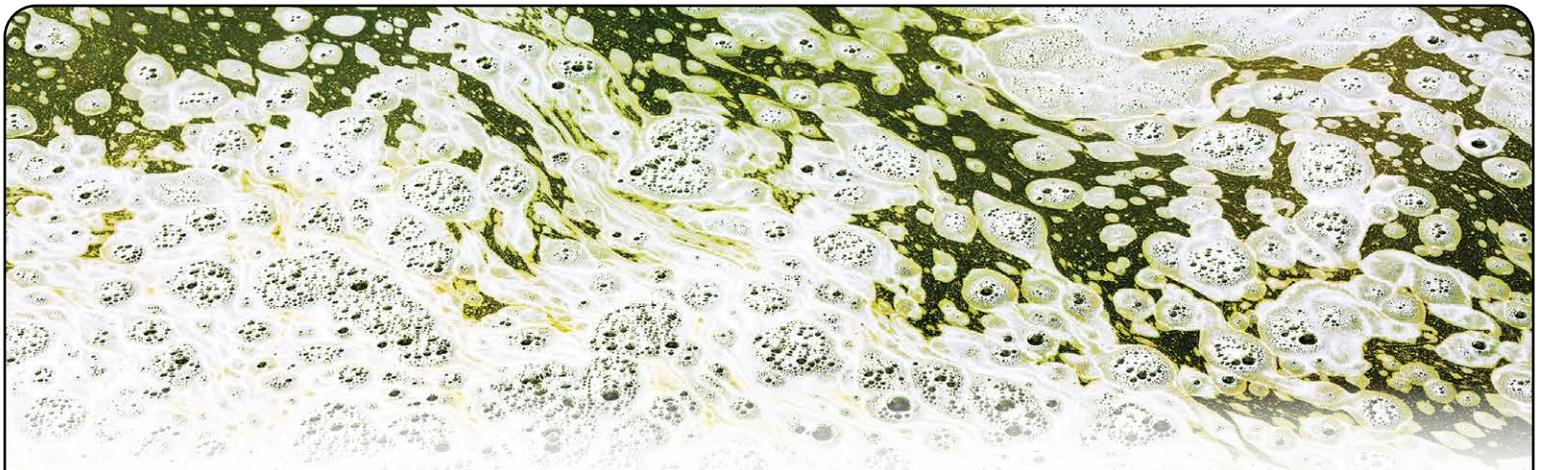
At the state level, the report hits on recurring themes: failure of state budget writers to fully fund clean water programs and failure of Georgia's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) to enforce clean water laws.

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 the agency did in 2005.

This stagnant funding has led to delays in cleaning up polluted rivers. On the Coosa River EPD failed to complete studies to determine safe pollution levels. Now, after seven years of inaction, EPD has agreed to let one of the river's major polluting industries pay for and conduct the studies.

Lack of funding has also delayed cleanups at hundreds of hazardous waste sites and illegal tire dumps across the state. Since the 1990s, lawmakers have collected nearly \$500 million in fees from Georgia taxpayers that were supposed to be used to address these pollution problems, but 40 percent of that (about \$200 million) has been diverted to other portions of the state budget.





Whether because of lack of funding or lack of political will, EPD has failed to properly enforce Georgia's clean water laws.

In Jesup, pollution from Rayonier Advanced Materials pulp mill continues to foul the Altamaha River. Even though federal regulators have told EPD that pollution at the mill needs to be cleaned up, EPD continues to side with the powerful corporation.

Likewise, EPD and state lawmakers defer to Georgia Power Company when it comes to disposing of toxic coal ash and cleaning out ash ponds at the company's power plants. As a result, toxic pollutants threaten Lake Sinclair near Milledgeville while coal ash dumped in a Chatham County landfill may pollute local groundwater.

Protecting the natural areas along the state's rivers and streams has also been a problem for EPD. A 2015 Georgia Supreme Court decision has caused confusion about how to identify "stream buffers." Now, EPD struggles to enforce the law consistently, resulting in dirt and mud flowing into our rivers.

Meanwhile, the state's Public Service Commission must decide next year whether to continue supporting the construction of two nuclear reactors at Plant Vogtle near Waynesboro. Some \$14 billion over budget, the project will stress the Savannah River and strap ratepayers and taxpayers with billions of dollars to support this private project.

On the Georgia coast, the Elba Island natural gas processing center and export facility poses a risk to Savannah area residents, and in the light of efforts to achieve U.S. energy independence, raises questions about the wisdom of exporting natural gas.

In Brunswick, local anglers are eating fish exposed to plumes of toxins from Hercules Inc., a company that produced a cancer-causing chemical known as toxaphene. Cleanup plans fail to address the many pollution problems at the site.

Finally, in southwest Georgia a private company is promising it can solve the decades-old water war with Florida and Alabama if it can just get state funding to build giant reservoirs in Taylor and Macon counties that will cost hundreds of millions.

This Dirty Dozen list is not a list of the state's most polluted water bodies, nor is it arranged in any specific order. Instead, the Dirty Dozen shines a spotlight on problems that ultimately harm—or could harm— Georgia property owners, downstream communities, fish and wildlife, hunters and anglers, and boaters and swimmers.

The GWC publishes this report as a call to action for our state's leaders and its citizens. GWC 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.

