

# 2017's Worst Offenses Against GEORGIA'S WATER

## COOSA RIVER

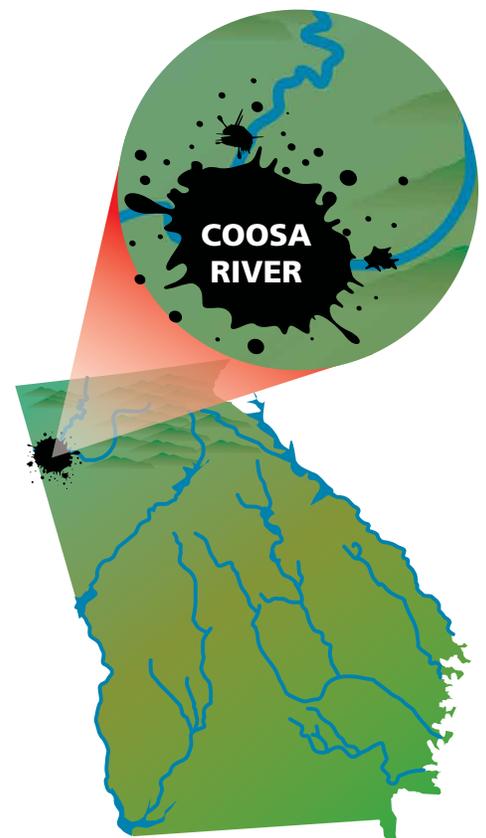
U.S. EPA Halts Clean Water Rules For Power Plants, Keeps Toxic Discharges Flowing to the Coosa

### INTRODUCTION:

Earlier this year, Georgia Power Company and Georgia's Environmental Protection Division were moving forward with plans to reduce the amount of toxic heavy metals discharged to the Coosa River at Plant Hammond, a coal-fired power plant west of Rome. But then in April, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt announced that the agency had decided to review and reconsider its "effluent limitation guidelines," a rule adopted in 2015 requiring upgrades to pollution controls at power plants. Now, that cleanup plan to provide relief to the Coosa and Weiss Lake is indefinitely delayed. While the Trump Administration claims pollution upgrades were not "economically or technologically feasible," the reality is some power plants are already meeting the requirements, and Georgia Power was on track to meet some of the requirements of the rule well in advance of federal regulatory deadlines.

### THE WATER BODY:

The upper Coosa River basin is considered North America's most biologically unique river basin with 30 endemic aquatic species, and the Coosa River in particular is unique because it is one of only a handful of locations in the country where land-locked striped bass still spawn. The Coosa River in Georgia also feeds Weiss Lake in Alabama, located just downstream from Plant Hammond's discharge. The 30,200-acre Alabama Power reservoir is the economic calling card for Centre, Alabama and Cherokee County. Tourism associated with the lake is the county's primary industry, with an economic impact of \$250 million annually. The Coosa River basin is also burdened with energizing much of Georgia's electric grid—home to not only Plant Hammond, but also Plant Bowen, one of the largest coal-fired power plants in the country.





## THE DIRT:

The toxins discharged into our nation's other waterways each year from coal-fired power plants reads like a witch's brew: 65,000 pounds of lead, 3,000 pounds of mercury, 79,200 pounds of arsenic, 225,000 pounds of selenium. In fact, the nation's coal-fired power plants are responsible for 72 percent of all toxic water pollution in the country. At Plant Hammond, much of these toxins are discharged to large ash ponds at the facility and then released to the Coosa.

These serious risks to human health and the environment prompted EPA to investigate and implement in 2015 new rules governing how much of these toxins coal-fired power plants should discharge to our nation's rivers.

Since the rules were adopted, many utilities, including Georgia Power, have begun the process of meeting the new standards, a fact that calls into question the legitimacy of EPA claims that the requirements are not economically or technologically feasible.

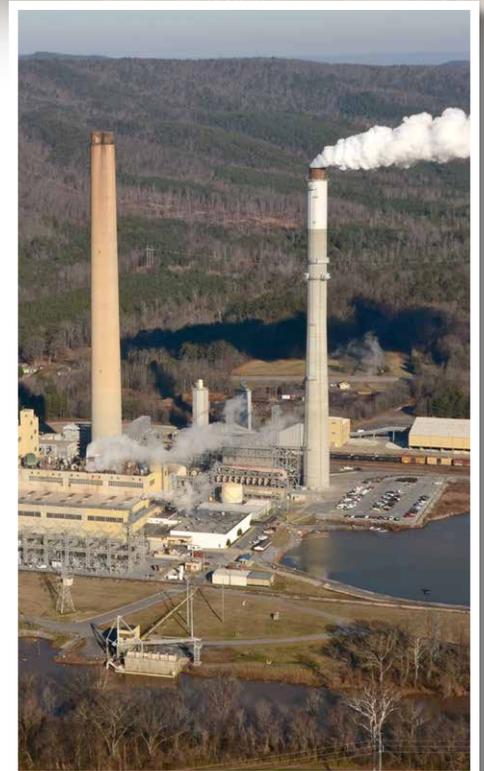
At Plant Hammond, Georgia Power planned to meet pollution limits by 2023. And, when it comes to provisions of the rule requiring that utilities stop using water to move and process coal ash, Georgia Power planned to make the conversion to "dry handling" of ash at most facilities by 2019, well in advance of federal deadlines.

When Georgia's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) moved to update Plant Hammond's pollution control permit earlier this year, the public weighed in heavily to urge reductions in heavy metal pollution. Despite agreement among Georgia Power, state regulators, and environmental advocates that limiting this pollution was necessary and achievable, EPA's delay now leaves in question how the plant's discharges will be regulated.

EPA's delays place the profits of utilities over the health and well being of ordinary citizens. EPA estimates the 2015 rules will result in at least \$461 million in benefits to the American public. Meanwhile, delay of these rules will save utilities up to \$36.8 million annually.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE:

EPA should enforce all provisions of the 2015 effluent limitation guidelines under its original timeline beginning in 2018. Regardless of what federal regulators ultimately do with these rules, EPD should issue a pollution control permit for Plant Hammond that includes these effluent limitation guidelines. Adoption of these standards will protect public health and the Coosa River.



*Top: Ash ponds at Georgia Power Company's Plant Hammond hold spent coal ash and a host of toxins. Water from the ponds is ultimately released to the Coosa River. Above right: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency decision to delay implementing new rules limiting the release of toxins from coal-fired power plant to the country's rivers will mean that mercury, arsenic, lead, selenium and other pollutants will continue to be dumped in the Coosa River at Georgia Power Company's Plant Hammond in Floyd County.*



### For More Information Contact:

**Zachary Fabish**, Sierra Club, 202-675-7917,  
zachary.fabish@sierraclub.org

**Jesse Demonbreun-Chapman**, Coosa River  
Basin Initiative, 706-232-2724, jesse@coosa.org