

# 2017's Worst Offenses Against GEORGIA'S WATER

## LAKE SINCLAIR

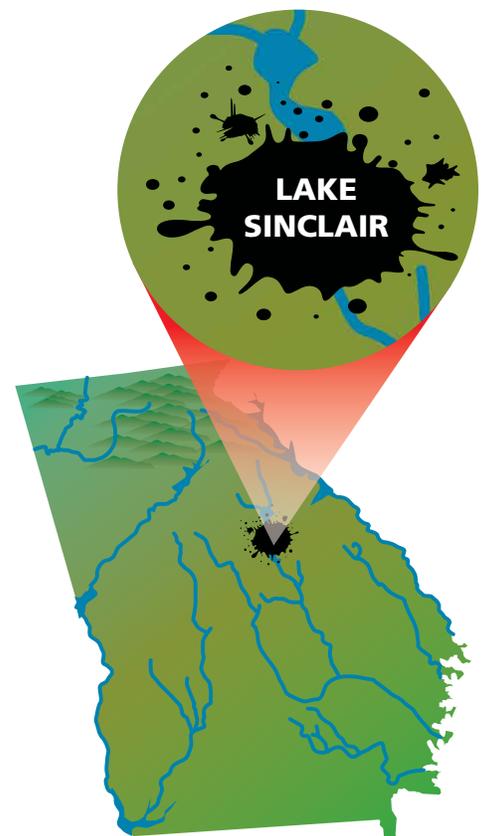
### Weak Regulations Send Toxins from Shuttered Power Plant to Premiere Lake

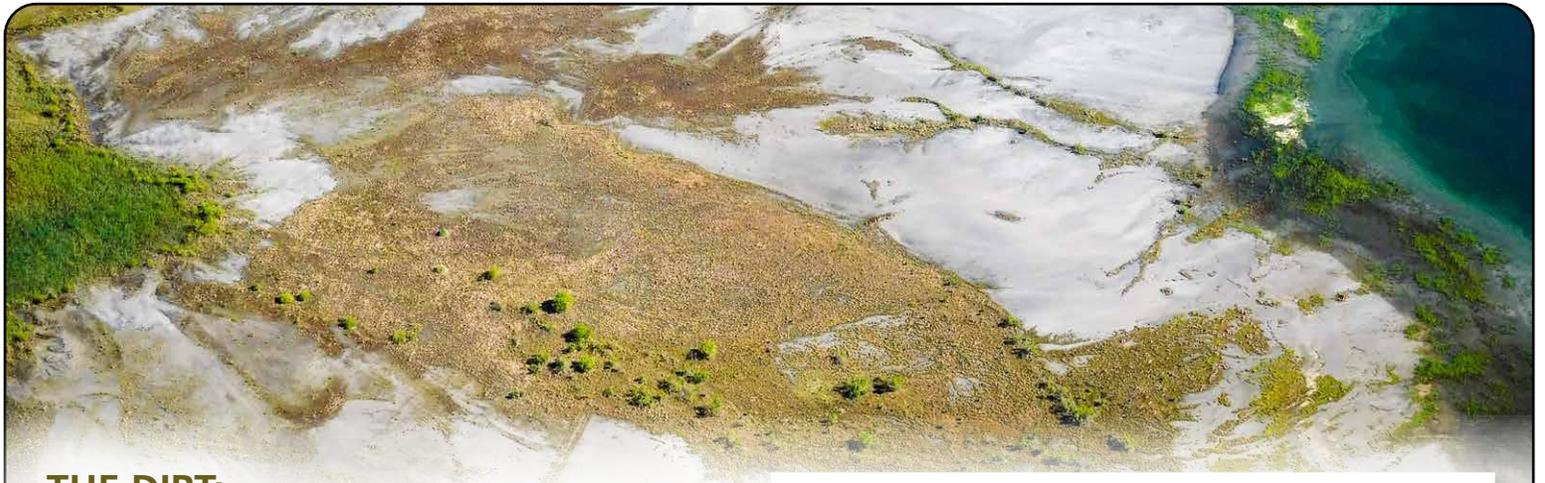
#### INTRODUCTION:

Given the opportunity to enact regulations to protect Georgia's water and the health of communities downstream from coal-fired power plants, Georgia's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) and legislators earlier this year did what has become all too common—they deferred to influential business interests. Now, Georgia Power Company is proceeding with plans to close 29 ash ponds at 11 of its coal-fired generation plants across the state with inadequate oversight from EPD. These plans include efforts to drain water from those ponds and discharge it to the state's waterways. Ash pond water is known to contain toxic substances like arsenic, mercury, lead and selenium. At the now closed Plant Branch near Milledgeville, Lake Sinclair will be on the receiving end of this pollution. Rather than set clear limits on how much toxins could be released during the closure of these ponds, EPD has instead agreed to allow Georgia Power to simply monitor for these toxins. Under the plan, EPD will limit toxic discharges only if the monitoring shows evidence of toxins being released above what it deems acceptable. Of course, by then, damage will already have been done. To make matters worse, the release of these toxins can take place at any time, with no requirement for Georgia Power to notify downstream water utilities, communities or other water users.

#### THE WATER BODY:

A man-made reservoir on the Oconee River, Lake Sinclair has been a recreation hot spot in middle Georgia since the completion of Sinclair Dam in 1953. Covering 15,330 acres in Baldwin, Hancock and Putnam counties and offering up 417 miles of scenic shoreline, it is an economic driver for the region, supporting a \$77 million a year tourism economy in Baldwin County alone. The draw of Lake Sinclair and its sister reservoir upstream, Lake Oconee, (both built and operated by Georgia Power) are such that local boosters have taken to promoting the region as "Georgia's Lake Country" where the wealthy and famous visit and live at upscale resorts and communities like Reynolds Plantation, Harbor Club and The Sanctuary. The Oconee is part of Georgia's largest river basin, joining the Ocmulgee River downstream to form the Altamaha River which empties into the Atlantic Ocean near Darien.





## THE DIRT:

Coal ash is nothing to toy with. Toxins associated with serious health problems and environmental dangers including arsenic, mercury, lead and selenium are known to exist in coal ash. A catastrophic failure of a coal ash pond in Tennessee in 2008 prompted the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to enact new regulations on the disposal of the toxic remains of burning coal at the nation's power plants. These went into effect in 2015.



Those regulations led to Georgia Power announcing its plans to close all 29 of its ash ponds around the state. The plans include dewatering the ponds and removing the remaining coal ash from some, but not all of these storage sites. In fact, the vast majority of Georgia Power's coal ash will be left in place next to lakes, rivers, and streams, where it will continue to pose a risk to these waterways.

EPD has failed to oversee the closure of these ponds in a manner that will limit the amount of toxins released to the state's water. Although Georgia Power must treat water before pumping it to Lake Sinclair, EPD is not imposing limits on how much toxins can be discharged—a practice that is common in EPD's other pollution control permits.

Additionally, EPD does not require Georgia Power to notify downstream communities, recreational and commercial water users or public water suppliers before the company begins dewatering an ash pond.

Monitoring reports that Georgia Power has already filed with EPD at sites where the dewatering has or is taking place show that toxins have been released to our waterways.

When concerned legislators introduced bills to address these shortcomings, the bills were met with opposition from Georgia Power and EPD. Though attention to the issue prompted EPD to create a webpage providing information about approved dewatering plans, the bills died in committee.

Instead an ad-hoc committee of the House Natural Resources & Environment Committee was created to study coal ash disposal. At the committee's first meeting in March, representatives from Georgia Power and EPD addressed legislators, but no one else was permitted to provide testimony.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE:

Georgia legislators should take up and vote on bills that address shortcomings in EPD's oversight of coal ash pond dewatering plans. EPD must set clear limits on how much toxic pollutants can be released to Georgia's rivers and lakes during dewatering and must provide downstream communities with sufficient notice before dewatering takes place.

*Top: An aerial view shows coal ash ponds at Georgia Power Company's shuttered Plant Branch facility adjacent to Lake Sinclair. Above right: Lake Sinclair will be on the receiving end of toxic pollution when Georgia Power begins dewatering its coal ash ponds at the now shuttered Plant Branch. The lake is popular with boaters, anglers and swimmers.*



### For More Information Contact:

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