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EPD Responds to Dirty Dozen Listing By Proposing Dirty Rule Change

Atlanta, GA—This week, the Board of the Department of Natural Resources will consider changes to a water pollution rule that could harm all of Georgia's waterways in the interest of industrial polluters.

One week after Rayonier Advanced Materials was listed as a top polluter in the Georgia Water Coalition's 2017 Dirty Dozen report, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division proposed changes to clean water regulations to allow Rayonier to continue polluting the Altamaha River. The smelly and visible discharge from the facility prevents many community members from swimming and fishing in the area. EPD's request to change the rule also comes after a state administrative law judge recently ruled that Rayonier AM's discharge violates existing state water quality rules. In its letter to the Board of Natural Resources, EPD requested approval for amendments that would re-write the regulation:

"All waters shall be free from material related to municipal, industrial or other discharges which produce turbidity, color, odor or other objectionable conditions which **unreasonably** [language added] interfere with **designated** [replaces "legitimate"] water uses."

These changes would have major ramifications and would apply to all of Georgia's rivers, lakes and streams. Changing "legitimate" to "designated" would reduce legal protections for activities such as boating and swimming. The insertion of "unreasonably" would give industrial polluters an additional loophole to weaken citizen enforcement suits.

"Every waterfront property owner in Georgia and every fisherman, paddler, and swimmer should pay attention," said Gordon Rogers, Flint Riverkeeper. "Your water and your property values are being put in jeopardy by the state agency that is supposed to protect you, but in fact is in the pocket of well-connected, powerful polluters."

"This isn't just a simple matter of changing a few words in a meaningless rule—these proposed amendments would gut protections for Georgia's rivers, streams and creeks across the entire state," said Jen Hilburn, Altamaha Riverkeeper. "Giving polluters a free pass has already

contributed to the degradation of the Altamaha River, and continuing down the path of weaker enforcement does nothing to protect Georgia citizens.”

About the Georgia Water Coalition:

The Georgia Water Coalition is a consortium of over 240 conservation and environmental organizations, hunting and fishing groups, businesses, and faith-based organizations. The Coalition’s mission is to protect and care for Georgia’s surface water and groundwater resources, which are essential for sustaining economic prosperity, providing clean and abundant drinking water, preserving diverse aquatic habitats for wildlife and recreation, strengthening property values, and protecting the quality of life for current and future generations.

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