

Georgia's 2018

CLEAN WATER HEROES

Clayton County Water Authority

FLINT RIVER

Water Utility Restores Flows to River In Need

INTRODUCTION:

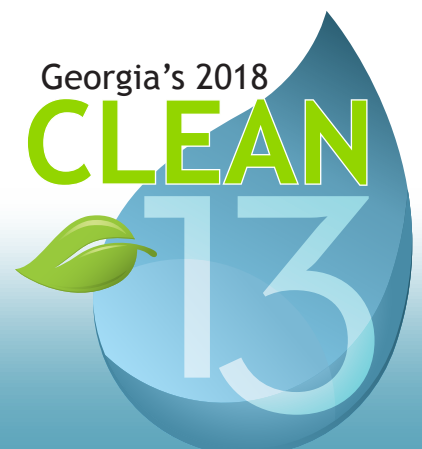
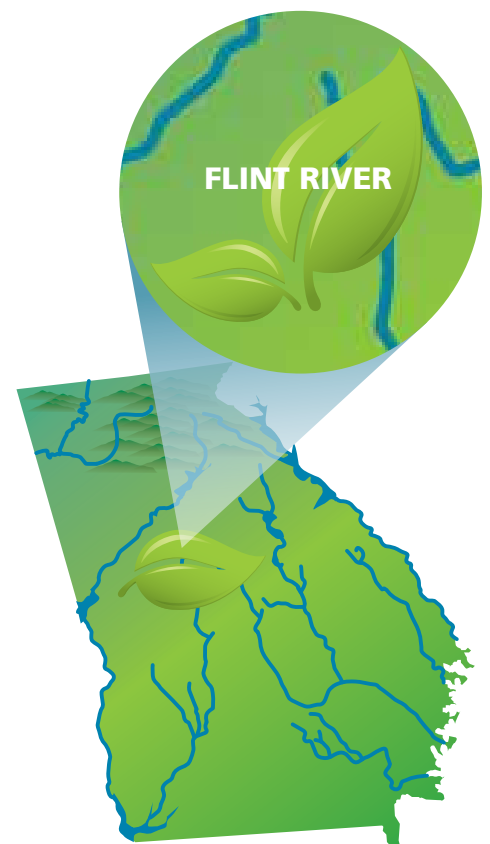
When it comes to water supplies, Clayton County, with a population of nearly 275,000 residents, sits at a precarious place. The county's primary water source is the tiny Flint River. When that river passes into Clayton County at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, it is a creek small enough to step across. By necessity, the Clayton County Water Authority has been forced to innovate in order to provide water for its more than 78,000 customers. In 2010, the Authority completed a \$30 million wetlands-based water reuse program that each day turns some 10 million gallons of treated wastewater into potable water for homes and businesses. This water "recycling" has helped reduce demands on the Flint, and now the Authority is upgrading a wastewater treatment plant that will for the first time in nearly a half-century return flows directly to the Flint—a move that will help restore the river's historic flows that have been lost as demand for its water has steadily grown over the past half century.

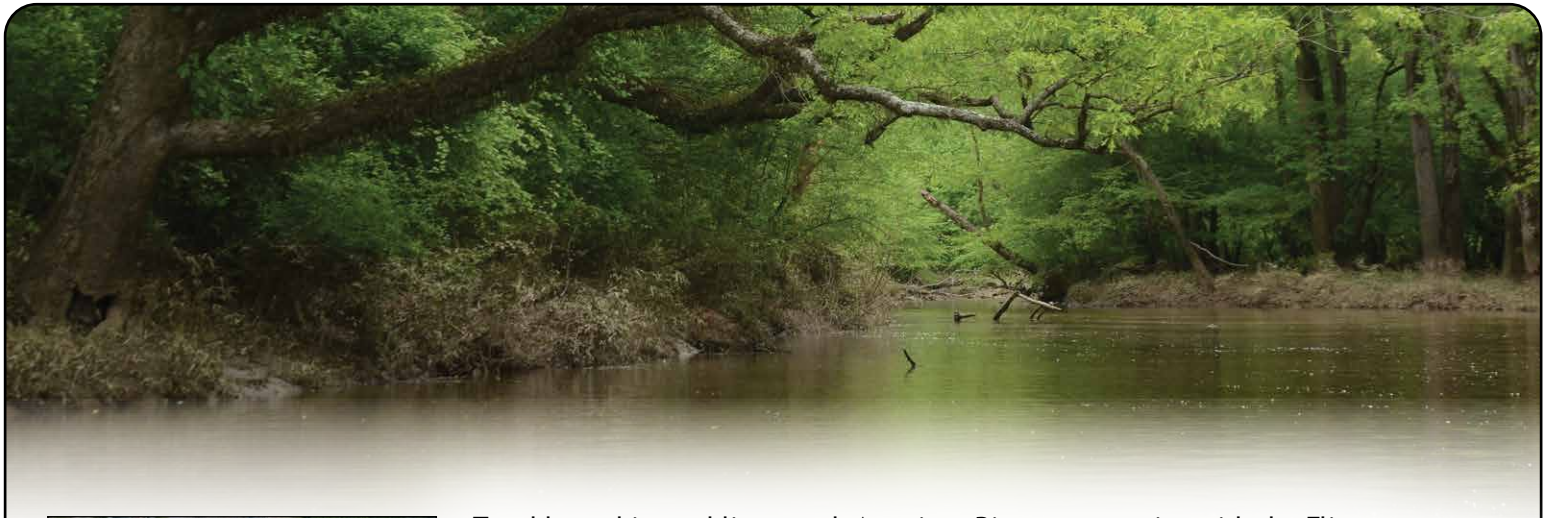
THE WATER BODY:

The Flint River, starting as a spring just northwest of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (and flowing for almost 2 miles beneath the runways of world's busiest airport), is one of only 40 rivers in the United States that flows for more than 200 miles unimpeded by dams on its main stem. It is home to some of the most scenic river terrain in the state as it passes beneath Pine Mountain and is home to fish species unique to the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint like the shoal bass and Halloween darter. Additionally, it and its tributaries harbor habitat for federally-protected mussel species. In metro Atlanta, the Flint and creeks feeding it provide drinking water for all of Clayton and Fayette counties as well as much of Coweta County, Griffin and surrounding communities. For years, the river has been embroiled in a water dispute between Georgia, Florida and Alabama. At question is the amount of water flowing down the Flint and Chattahoochee rivers to meet the needs of Georgia's downstream neighbors.

THE CLEAN:

Since the 1940s, flows on the Flint River through metro Atlanta have seen major declines during drought. The conversion of forest and field to concrete and asphalt, the construction of ponds and lakes, increased demands for drinking water and a failure to return treated wastewater to the Flint have all contributed to the downward spiral. Today, during periods of drought, there is 70 percent less water in the Flint than there was during similar periods in the 1950s.





To address this troubling trend, American Rivers, partnering with the Flint Riverkeeper and local water utilities including the Clayton County Water Authority, has convened the Upper Flint River Working Group. The Group has worked since 2013 to identify ways to restore healthy flows in the Flint.

Acknowledging the concerns of river stakeholders and downstream communities, the Authority now plans to return flows to the river by embarking on a major upgrade of its W.B Casey Water Reclamation Facility and the construction of a new discharge to the Flint River. When completed, the project will for the first time since the 1970s return a portion of Clayton County's treated wastewater directly to the Flint. It also allows the Authority to accommodate expected population growth in the area and the water and wastewater demands that come with it.

"We had concerns about the sustainability of the Flint long term since it's the principle water supply for the county," said Mike Thomas, who retired as the Authority's general manager in June. "We were eventually going to run out of [wastewater] capacity. This allows us to address a small interbasin transfer and gives us more flexibility."

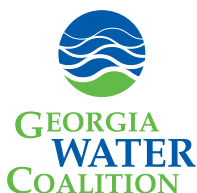
Indeed, the project will help reverse the decades-old practice of withdrawing drinking water from the Flint River and discharging it as treated wastewater to the nearby Ocmulgee River basin—a transfer of water that contributes to a daily loss of about 12 million gallons from the Flint's flow.

Initially, the Authority's project will amount to only about 2 million gallons a day, but the Upper Flint River Working Group views it as an important first step in restoring the Flint.

"With leadership from Clayton County Water Authority and its neighboring water utilities, we've begun to steer the river in a better direction," said Ben Emanuel with American Rivers. "We're not trying to restore the Flint to a pristine condition, but ultimately, this work will enable the river to do the work of supporting people, the economy and its own unique ecology into the future."



Top: Though small, the Flint River in Clayton County serves as a primary drinking water source for the area. During the past five decades, flows on the upper Flint have suffered as more water has been pumped from the river without it being returned to the river as treated wastewater. Left: The W.B. Casey Water Reclamation Facility in Jonesboro is being expanded to allow the Clayton County Water Authority to discharge treated wastewater directly to the Flint River. Above: The Clayton County Water Authority's E.L. Huie Jr. Constructed Treatment Wetlands allow the Authority to recycle 10 million gallons of treated wastewater into potable water for homes and businesses. They also attract water birds and other wildlife.



For More Information Contact:

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