

Georgia's 2018

CLEAN WATER HEROES

Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority

ETOWAH AND COOSA RIVERS

Water Conservation Leadership Reduces Demands on Stressed Rivers

INTRODUCTION:

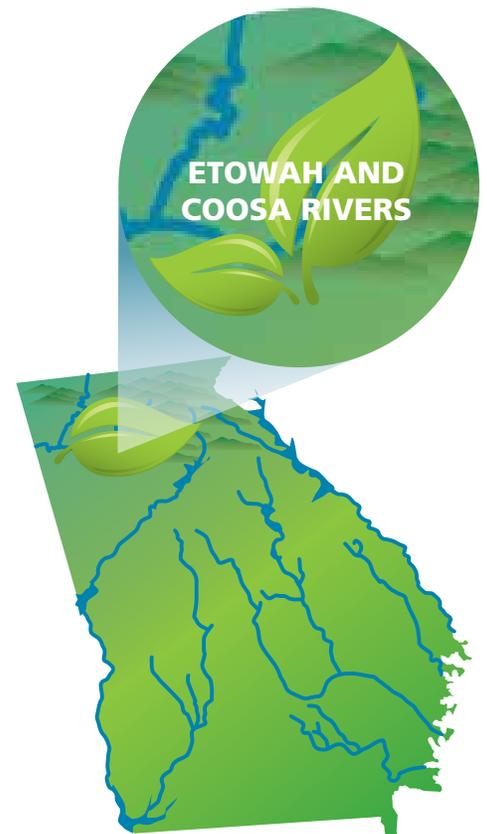
In the late 1990s as Georgia and Alabama attempted to broker a water sharing agreement for the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa river system, the situation looked grave for communities along the Etowah and Coosa rivers from Rome to Gadsden, Alabama. One proposed agreement would have allowed as much as 150 million gallons a day to be pumped from Lake Allatoona and the Etowah River and never returned, an amount more than five times the existing daily average. Such a massive diversion of water to metro Atlanta (known as an “interbasin transfer”) could handicap economic growth in downstream communities and could wreak havoc on the health of the river. Though the dispute between Georgia and Alabama has still not been settled, water conservation and efficiency measures undertaken by the Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority and its wholesale customers have eliminated the expected, ever-increasing water withdrawals from the Etowah and Lake Allatoona. Today, CCMWA’s average transfer of water out of the Etowah River is less than it was in the late 1990s, despite population growth in the Authority’s service area.

THE WATER BODY:

Though the Etowah River passes only along the northern edge of metro Atlanta’s suburbs, it plays a key role in the region’s drinking water supplies, producing about 13 percent of metro Atlanta’s supply. Coursing 163 miles from the north Georgia mountains near Dahlonega to Rome in northwest Georgia, it is considered one of the most biologically diverse rivers of its size in the country, hosting 76 native fish species, including three federally protected species. The Coosa River, formed when the Etowah meets the Oostanaula in Rome, courses into Alabama where it is dammed six times and plays a critical role in local economies from Cedar Bluff to Wetumpka.

THE CLEAN:

Metro Atlanta has long been the boogeyman for water users in the rest of Georgia—a giant behemoth hogging and diverting all the water from smaller downstream communities. Leaking pipes, wasteful water practices and failing sewage systems rightfully earned the metro region the ire of its downstream neighbors. But, since the creation of the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District in 2001, the region has made significant strides in protecting water for those downstream.





Among District members, the Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority and its wholesale customers have been leaders.

In the midst of drought in 2000, CCMWA created the waterSmart program, an effort to promote water conservation among its customers. When drought struck Georgia again in 2006, Georgia’s Environmental Protection Division adapted that same program for use statewide.

In the past two decades, water saving programs like toilet retrofits, conservation pricing, leak detection and repairs on water mains, outdoor watering restrictions and in-schools education programs have limited and even reduced demands on Lake Allatoona and the



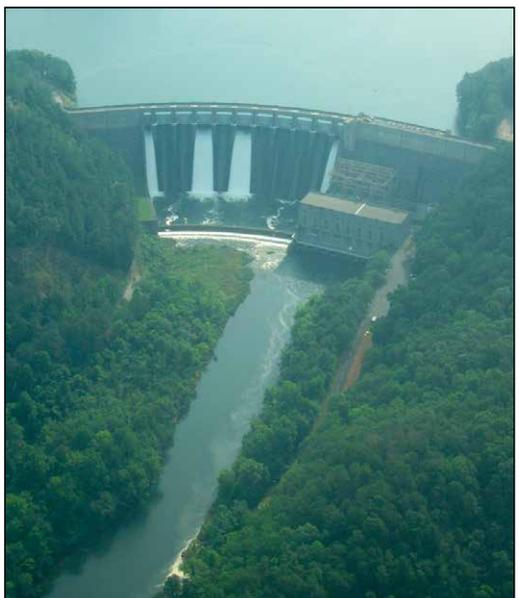
Etowah River.

At the height of the historic drought of 2006-2007, CCMWA’s monthly average production was as high as 129 million gallons per day (MGD). Since then, the Authority’s monthly production average has topped 100 MGD only once, and the water permanently transferred out of the Etowah basin has declined slightly to about 22 MGD—a far cry from the 150 MGD feared in the late 1990s. These reductions have occurred despite nearly 300,000 people moving to the area serviced by CCMWA.

Some of the gains in efficiency have been the result of an aggressive water loss prevention program including: pipe replacement, leak detection initiatives, and meter testing and replacement. Today, CCMWA and the Cobb County Water System lose just 10 percent of the water they pump from local waterways, well below the state average.

Though it seems counter productive for a water utility that exists to sell water to invest in water conservation, CCMWA has been an industry leader for the past three decades.

“It became clear to us in the 1980s that our ability to meet all our customers needs would be contingent on either creating more supplies or stretching the limited supply that was available,” said Glenn Page, CCMWA General Manager. “We have a limited resource and we have to accept that fact.”



Top: Water conservation education efforts initiated by Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority have reached thousands of youth in Cobb County schools. Left: Identifying leaks and upgrading water infrastructure have helped the Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority reduce the amount of water the Authority pumps from Lake Allatoona and the Etowah River. Above: Allatoona Dam near Cartersville forms Lake Allatoona. Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority pumps water from Lake Allatoona to supply a service area population of more than 850,000.



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