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<https://www.gawater.org/clean-13>

Leading Water Protection Coalition Announces Clean Water Heroes in 2018 Clean 13 Report

Today, Georgia's leading water protection coalition released its Clean 13 report for 2018. The report highlights individuals, businesses, industries, non-profit organizations and governmental agencies whose extraordinary efforts have led to cleaner water in Georgia.

"Since the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972, we've seen Georgia's waterways become cleaner and healthier, but there's still much that needs to be done," said Joe Cook, advocacy and communication coordinator with Coosa River Basin Initiative, a Georgia Water Coalition member organization. "Those recognized in our Clean 13 report are setting new standards to protect, preserve and restore Georgia's rivers, lakes, streams and coastal waters."

In North Georgia, Riverview Farms in Gordon County protects the Coosawattee River by preserving natural buffers along the river and by fencing cattle and hogs to prevent them from fouling the river. Their organic farming practices further prevent chemical pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers from harming the river.

In far South Georgia, the Stripling Irrigation Research Park, managed by the University of Georgia (UGA), works with farmers to encourage them to adopt water efficient irrigation practices that keep more water in Georgia's rivers for wildlife, recreation and downstream communities.

In Athens, the University of Georgia's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources is responsible this year for a groundbreaking dam modification. In July, the school and multiple state and federal partners breached an obsolete century-old dam to reconnect 22 miles of the Middle Oconee River and improve habitat for numerous fish species.

Also at UGA, Dr. Jenna Jambeck, an environmental engineering professor, has become a leader in research on plastic pollution in oceans. Her work is informing waste management worldwide.

In West Point, LaGrange and Atlanta, Interface, one of the world's largest producers of modular floor coverings, has set the bar for sustainable manufacturing practices. In addition to increasing energy efficiency and reducing waste, the company has invested in massive rainwater harvesting projects at its Georgia facilities to reduce demands on the Chattahoochee River.

Likewise, in Carrollton, Southwire, a world leader in the production of wire and cable, now uses collected rainwater at its manufacturing facility. The company's 5-million gallon stormwater collection system has the added benefit of protecting a nearby creek.

At the state capital, House Majority Leader Rep. Jon Burns (R-Newington) has used his position to push legislation protecting Georgia's water and land as well as the property rights of all Georgians, including this year's landmark Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act.

In Brunswick, the Glynn Environmental Coalition (GEC) is recognized in the report for the organization's nearly 30 years of efforts on behalf of Glynn County communities. GEC aids locals in ensuring that cleanups at four superfund sites in the county protect their health, their property and the environment.

Along the Savannah River, water utilities in Savannah, Augusta and Columbia County are supporting a study that will ultimately restore the health of the river by reconnecting its main channel with bends or "oxbows" that were cut off during 20th century engineering projects implemented in a failed attempt to bring river barges from the coast to Augusta. Augusta and Columbia County have already committed to supporting the project financially, and Savannah's City Council is expected to vote on the matter next month.

In Jonesboro, the Clayton County Water Authority is restoring the Flint River by building a new sewage treatment plant that for the first time in some 30 years will return treated wastewater directly to the river. The project will help restore water levels on the upper Flint, a river that has suffered from multiple diversions during the past 50 years.

In Atlanta's northern suburbs, the Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority's efforts to promote water conservation among its customers and improve the efficiency of its network of water lines has led to a significant reduction in the amount of water it pumps from Lake Allatoona, thus leaving more water in the Etowah River for downstream users.

On the Georgia coast, the Lodge on Little St. Simons Island has become a model for sustainable tourism on Georgia's barrier islands. Aside from preserving the 11,000-acre island as wilderness, the Lodge's replacement of a wooden bulkhead at its island dock with a "living shoreline" has proven the effectiveness of natural measures to protect the state's sensitive coastline.

Finally, as Georgia continues court battles with Florida and Alabama over the equitable use of water shared between the states, the work of the Apalachicola Chattahoochee Flint Stakeholders has provided a road map for ending the litigation and creating a plan that protects the rivers and their many users.

Together, the efforts of these “Clean 13” are adding up to cleaner rivers, stronger communities and a more sustainable future for Georgia.

The Georgia Water Coalition publishes this list not only to recognize these positive efforts on behalf of Georgia’s water but also as a call to action for our state’s leaders and citizens to review these success stories, borrow from them and emulate them.

The Georgia Water Coalition is a consortium of more than 250 conservation and environmental organizations, hunting and fishing groups, businesses, and faith-based organizations that have worked to protect Georgia’s water since 2002.