



DIRTY DOZEN

2018: Dirty Politics Leads to Dirty Water

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For more information about specific Dirty Dozen sites view the report at:

For Immediate Release Nov. 13, 2018: Today, Georgia's leading water advocacy organizations released their "Dirty Dozen" for 2018 in a 29-page report highlighting 12 of the worst offenses to Georgia's waters (<https://www.gawater.org/resources/dirty-dozen>).

Rather than identifying the "most polluted places" in Georgia, the Georgia Water Coalition's (GWC) Dirty Dozen report instead highlights the politics, policies and issues that threaten the health of Georgia's water and the well-being of 10 million Georgians.

"From state leaders deceiving citizens and shortchanging environmental programs in the state budget to powerful corporations using their influence to change state policy at the expense of ordinary citizens, this report is as much about dirty politics as it is dirty water," said Jesse Demonbreun-Chapman, Executive Director and Riverkeeper with the Coosa River Basin Initiative in Rome.

Ten days in March illustrated the extent of the dirt in Georgia's politics when it comes to protecting our water.

On March 27, the 19-member Department of Natural Resources Board voted to weaken Georgia's clean water rules. The rule change came on the heels of a state court decision that determined that Rayonier Advanced Materials wastewater discharge into the Altamaha River violated state rules. When Georgia's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) and Rayonier AM lost in court, the agency simply changed the rules to benefit the Jesup pulp mill. The Board agreed to the change unanimously. An executive with the Rayonier's Jesup mill sits on that same board.

That same week, state budget writers failed to adopt legislation that would end the annual looting of the Hazardous Waste and Solid Waste Trust Funds, programs designed to clean up hazardous waste sites and illegal tire dumps. Citizens and businesses paid some \$21 million into these funds the previous year, but budget writers provided only \$6.8 million for these programs in the 2019 budget, breaking trust with citizens and leaving about 100 hazardous waste sites still waiting cleanups.

And, on March 29, in the closing minutes of the General Assembly session, Georgia Power Company, which has thus far made nearly \$400,000 in campaign contributions to Georgia politicians during the 2016 and 2018 election cycles, persuaded legislators to keep landfill tipping fees for toxic coal ash 60 percent less than tipping fees for ordinary household garbage. The move gives the company a potential \$12 million windfall while depriving local governments of important revenue they receive from hosting these regional landfills. The deal also exposes Georgians to more toxic coal ash shipped from out of state.

Budgeting for the state's environmental protection efforts also comes under fire in the report.

Funding for EPD has remained stagnant despite growing state revenues. In the 2019 budget, the agency received less in state funding than it did in 2005. Adjusted for inflation, EPD received about 21 percent less in the current budget than it did 14 years ago.

This lack of funding has contributed to tragedies like the March chemical spill at a Dawsonville chicken processing facility that led to the deaths of more than 8,000 fish on Flat Creek. EPD industrial stormwater staff had not reviewed and inspected the facility's stormwater pollution prevention plan in the previous five years. A staff of one part-time and two full-time employees is responsible for more than 2800 facilities statewide.

"Protecting Georgia's drinking water and the places where we fish, swim, boat and play takes both money and political will," said Megan Desrosiers, Executive Director of the coastal protection group One Hundred Miles. "Too often, our state leaders lack the will and deprive state agencies of the money they need to do their jobs correctly."

Issues highlighted in the Dirty Dozen report include:

- Altamaha River: Department of Natural Resources Board changes clean water rules to defend polluter (Jesup/Wayne County).
- Apalachee River: Unnecessary drinking water intake threatens flows, fish and property owners (Walton, Morgan and Greene counties)
- Cumberland Island: Proposed spaceport threatens premiere barrier islands (Camden County)
- Georgia's Coast: Shoreline engineering project for luxury development threatens neighboring beaches and wildlife (Brunswick, Glynn County).
- Georgia's Coast: Gov. Nathan Deal's silence on federal proposal to drill for oil off Georgia's coast betrays coastal communities. (Chatham, Bryan, Liberty, McIntosh, Glynn and Camden counties)

- Georgia's Drinking Water: Powerful lobbyists secure loophole inviting out-of-state coal ash to Georgia landfills (Cherokee, Meriwether, Banks, Taylor, Chatham and Charlton counties)
- Georgia's Public Health: Legislators divert funds intended for clean community programs. (Statewide)
- Georgia's Streams and Rivers: Legislators fail to protect vulnerable Georgia streams. (Statewide)
- Georgia's Streams and Wetlands: Federal assault on Clean Water Act threatens Georgia's water. (Statewide)
- Ocmulgee River, Lake Juliette and Groundwater: Coal ash pond at Plant Scherer pollutes groundwater, threatens nearby surface water (Monroe County)
- Flat Creek: Chemical spill kills mountain stream and endangered species; highlights weak state oversight of industrial sites. (Dawsonville/Dawson County)
- Savannah River: Nuclear money pit saddles taxpayers, utility ratepayers with billions. (Waynesboro/Burke County)

The full Dirty Dozen report and individual contacts for each item listed above are available online: <https://www.gawater.org/resources/dirty-dozen>

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 been working to protect Georgia's water since 2002.