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Senate Vote Puts the ‘Trust back in Trust Funds’ Vote Authorizes Question on Nov. Ballot; Could Lead to Tire Dump and Toxic Waste Clean-up

ATLANTA, GA – The Georgia Water Coalition (GWC) is celebrating the passage of HR 164—a constitutional amendment that will dedicate fees collected specifically for trust funds to pay for environmental cleanups. Unfortunately, a constitutional loophole allows these funds to be regularly raided and spent on other portions of the state budget.

“Despite existing fees to fix the problem, illegal tire dumps and hazardous waste sites have languished for years in Georgia,” explained Jesse Demonbreun-Chapman, Executive Director & Riverkeeper of Coosa River Basin Initiative and member of the Georgia Water Coalition Leadership Team. “If we can ensure fee dollars are spent on clean community programs, we can make Georgia a safer and greener place to live.”

Beginning in 2004, the GWC has sought to protect fees that were created in the mid-1990s to fund environmental cleanup projects. The Solid and Hazardous Waste Trust Funds were intended to help pay for cleanups at illegal tire dumps, abandoned hazardous waste sites, and failing landfills. Georgia citizens pay into these funds whenever they purchase new tires or pay fees to haul their waste to a landfill.

Currently, more than 75 percent of the abandoned hazardous sites on Georgia’s Hazardous Site Inventory have been on that list awaiting remediation for more than 20 years. While state agencies struggled to put a dent in this inventory, lawmakers diverted more than \$200 million away from these projects and into the General Fund.

Rep. Jay Powell (R – Camilla) joined the effort to halt this legislative looting in 2012. He remained a steadfast leader on the subject until his sudden passing in November 2019. The passage of HR 164 is a tribute to his intellect and care for our natural resources.

This Monday, the Georgia Senate picked up where Powell left off and unanimously approved HR 164, thanks largely to the help of Lt. Governor Geoff Duncan and Sen. Chuck Hufstetler. This legislation is now headed to the ballot on November 3rd.

“The approval of the Constitutional Amendment would allow the Georgia General Assembly to take steps in the right direction to ‘put the trust in trust funds,’ said Kathleen Bowen, Associate Legislative Director of ACCG, Georgia’s County Association. “We feel confident that Georgia voters, when they vote in November, will understand that spending fees for the purpose they were collected is the transparent way for the state to operate.”

The Georgia Water Coalition is grateful for the leadership of Rep. Andy Welch, Lt. Governor Duncan, Sen. Hufstetler, and the late Rep. Jay Powell as well as all of the lawmakers that voted to approve this measure. GWC is committed to ensuring fair representation of the issue on the ballot and passage in November.

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*The **Georgia Water Coalition** is a consortium of more than 260 conservation and environmental organizations, hunting and fishing groups, businesses, and faith-based organizations that have been working to protect Georgia's water since 2002. www.gawater.org*