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General Assembly Must Act To Safely Store Coal Ash

Atlanta, GA - This morning, the House Committee on Natural Resources and the Environment held a hearing on coal ash issues impacting Georgians and our waterways. The Committee ceded the floor to the regulator--the Georgia Environmental Protection Division--and the utility responsible for essentially all of the toxic coal ash in state--Georgia Power--but limited questioning from legislators and failed to allow any public testimony during the meeting.

In its presentation and under questioning from Rep. Mary Frances Williams (D - HD 37, Marietta), Georgia Power admitted that coal ash contaminants have been detected in groundwater beyond Plant McDonough boundaries and within a Cobb County right-of-way adjacent to the power plant.

Georgia Power has submitted documentation to the state revealing that toxic coal ash in unlined pits across the state is sitting submerged with groundwater. The inadequate long-term storage plans will allow Georgia Power to charge ratepayers billions of dollars to leave coal ash in unlined storage facilities at Plant McDonough, Plant Wansley, Plant Yates and Plant Scherer. As a result, dangerous contaminants will continue to mix with groundwater that will migrate off site and potentially threaten adjacent surface waters and nearby drinking water supplies.

"We call on the Georgia House to step up for Georgia's waterways this session," said Jennette Gayer, Director of Environment Georgia and a chair of the Georgia Water Coalition's (GWC) Coal Ash Committee. "Coal ash ponds around our state are leaching toxins, and Georgia Power must be required by law to dispose of this toxic waste in lined, permitted landfills."

Coal ash is the residue left behind after burning coal and it is toxic--it can contain lead, selenium, arsenic and more. Much of Georgia's coal ash is stored in pits around coal-fired power plants owned by Georgia Power. These pits are unlined and [recent research indicates that the toxins in coal ash are leaking into the well water of nearby communities and triggering serious health problems](#). Unfortunately, Georgia Power does not plan to line these coal ash storage facilities where coal ash will be permanently left in groundwater, and which will likely lead to future contamination.

The GWC supports [House Bill 176](#) (sponsored by Rep. Debbie Buckner, D - HD137, Junction City), which would require that coal ash be stored in solid waste facilities that contain liners and

liquid waste collection systems that could prevent coal ash pollutants from contacting groundwater and threatening our drinking water resources.

More info on HB 176 and other bills being tracked can be found [here](#).

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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*