



2021's Worst Offenses Against GEORGIA'S WATER

CHATTAHOOCHEE AND OCMULGEE RIVERS

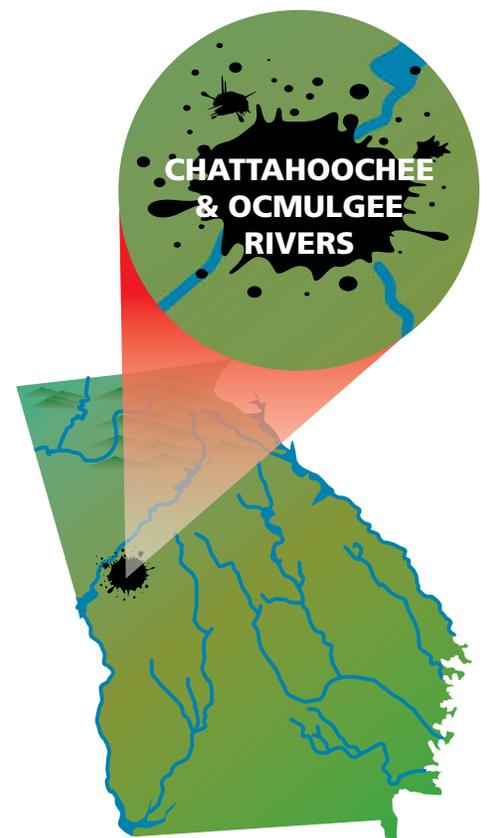
Toxic Coal Ash Pollutes Water Near Power Plants, State Regulators Poised to Leave it There

INTRODUCTION:

Few pollution problems have vexed state environmental regulators, environmental advocates and the Georgia Power Company more than coal ash. In fact, coal ash, the toxic remains of the burning of coal for power generation, is making a sixth consecutive appearance in the Dirty Dozen report. Perhaps most vexed are property owners near Georgia Power's coal-burning power plants along the Ocmulgee and Chattahoochee rivers that are now suffering from the legacy of decades of dirty power. At Plant Scherer in Monroe County on the Ocmulgee and Plants McDonough in Cobb County, Yates in Coweta County and Wansley in Carroll County on the Chattahoochee, coal ash now lies stored in unlined pits submerged in groundwater, and Georgia Power's own monitoring confirms that the ash is polluting the groundwater. At Plant Scherer, local residents surrounding the plant are reliant on private wells for their drinking water supplies, and last year confronted lawmakers urging them to do something to protect their homes and property. They were met with inaction. Now Georgia's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) is poised over the next few months to approve plans that will allow Georgia Power to leave their coal ash where it is. It is the pet owner's equivalent of leaving dog poop in a public park. Georgia Power and state regulators are making the risky bet that no one will step in it.

THE WATER BODY:

The Chattahoochee and Ocmulgee rivers are two of Georgia's signature rivers with both connected inextricably to the state's capital city. Together, water from the two river basins supplies more than 80 percent of metro Atlanta's water supplies and receives about 85 percent of the treated wastewater of metro Atlanta communities. While the Chattahoochee flows on Atlanta's western flank, the Ocmulgee's headwater streams begin in the City of Atlanta and its eastern suburbs. Collectively, the rivers and their tributaries have for years provided the water necessary to generate electricity at coal-fired power plants like Scherer, McDonough, Yates and Wansley. And, of course, they are recreational meccas, providing boaters, anglers and swimmers with play places like Jackson Lake on the Ocmulgee and West Point Lake on the Chattahoochee as well as miles of free-flowing river for paddling enthusiasts.





THE DIRT:

Other states are protecting their citizens from toxic coal ash. In Virginia, state legislators passed in 2019 a measure that requires that coal ash be removed from unlined pits and disposed of in lined landfills. That same year, North Carolina ordered Duke Energy to excavate all coal ash from unlined pits. But, in Georgia, state leaders have bowed to pressure from Georgia Power, and EPD is set to allow Georgia Power to keep 45 million tons of coal ash buried in unlined pits along the Chattahoochee and Ocmulgee rivers where it is coming in contact with groundwater.

Already, EPD has approved a similar plan for coal ash at Georgia Power's Plant Hammond on the Coosa River near Rome, and the agency is expected to make decisions about the coal ash at Scherer, McDonough, Yates and Wansley in the coming months.

Federal coal ash disposal regulations require that the toxic waste be stored in a dry state, absent the presence of liquids, but at all four power plants, the coal ash sits in unlined pits where it is already mixing with groundwater, polluting that water and risking migration to surface water.

For instance, at Plant McDonough, Georgia Power has proposed collecting more than 10,000 gallons of leachate daily from one portion of a closed, unlined ash pond to prevent it from flowing into the Chattahoochee. But, at plants Yates and Wansley, the company has thus far refused to collect leachate migrating to groundwater.

The result of this weak cleanup plan is predictable. Georgia Power's own monitoring reports show significant levels of coal ash pollutants in groundwater surrounding its unlined pits.

The coal ash storage site at Scherer is so unsuitable that it would be illegal to construct a new municipal solid waste landfill there today, even if it had a liner and a leachate collection system. In fact, Georgia's landfills that receive household waste are held to higher standards than Georgia Power's unlined coal ash pits.

The cost of EPD's failure to require proper coal ash cleanups is trickling down to the local level. Last year, Monroe County officials voted to proceed with a \$16 million plan to extend county water service to bring relief to residents around Plant Scherer.

WHAT MUST BE DONE:

The proposed permits for coal ash storage at plants Scherer, McDonough, Yates and Wansley violate federal regulations and should be rejected by EPD. EPD should require Georgia Power to excavate its coal ash stored in unlined pits and remove it to safe, lined landfills away from state waters and require more stringent monitoring of waste streams coming from their coal ash storage facilities.

Top: The coal ash pit at Plant Scherer sits adjacent to Lake Juliette, part of the Rum Creek Wildlife Management Area. The site is so unsuitable for storing waste that it would be illegal for the state to permit a new municipal solid waste landfill at the location, but Georgia Power's plan is to leave the ash where it lies.



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