

2021 GEORGIA'S
DIRTY
DOZEN



GEORGIA
WATER
COALITION

2021's Worst Offenses Against GEORGIA'S WATER

GEORGIA WATER COALITION'S DIRTY DOZEN A Call to Action

The Georgia Water Coalition's Dirty Dozen report highlights the politics, policies and issues that threaten the health of Georgia's water and the well-being of more than 10 million Georgians.

The Dirty Dozen is not a list of the state's "most polluted places." Instead the report is a call to action for Georgia's leaders and its citizens to solve ongoing pollution problems, eliminate potential threats to Georgia's water and correct state and federal policies and actions that lead to polluted water.

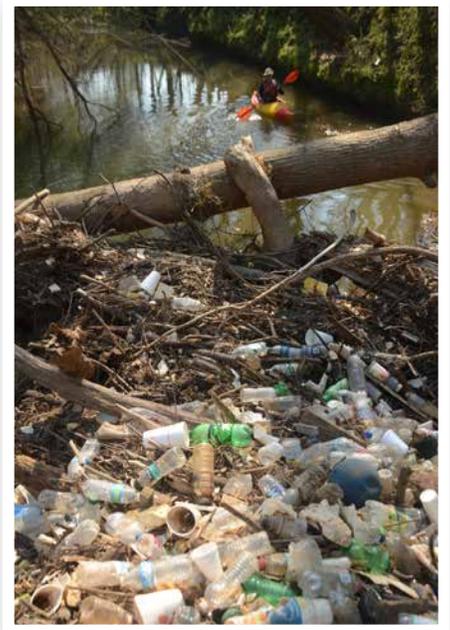
The problems highlighted in this eleventh edition of the report span the length and breadth of the state from Lake Harding in the west to St. Simons Sound on the coast and from the Conasauga River in the north to the Okefenokee Swamp in the south.

Of the 12 issues highlighted, five make return appearances on the inauspicious list.

Underlying each issue is an intersection between quality of life and quest for profit. Whether its an upstream development filling a neighborhood amenity lake with muddy sediment or a mining company threatening one of Georgia's natural wonders, in each is the struggle to find a balance between protecting our natural resources and accommodating the demands of a growing population and sustainable economy.

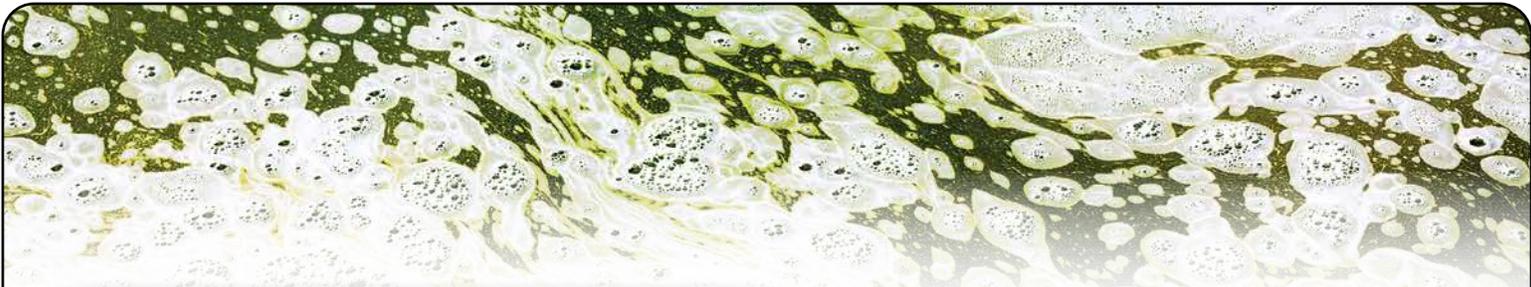
Topping the returners to the Dirty Dozen list is Georgia Power Company's coal ash. While other states have forced power utilities to remove toxic coal ash from unlined pits at coal-burning power plants, Georgia's leaders through the state's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) are poised to allow the company to keep its ash in unlined pits where it is making groundwater unfit for human consumption.

Milliken's textile plant in Screven County also returns to the list, largely because of another year of failure by EPD to force the company to take responsibility for its dangerous discharges into the Ogeechee River. Since 2018, EPD has failed to finalize a new pollution control permit for the facility while the company continues to discharge harmful polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) into the river. Meanwhile, a study of fish tissue that the plant was supposed to conduct remains uncompleted. The study would help determine the potential health impacts to those who eat fish caught from the river.



A flotilla of plastics piles up on the South River in Atlanta. The proliferation of plastics is a growing pollution problem and makes this year's Dirty Dozen report in an unusual way. A proposed plastic rendering plant in Macon-Bibb County seems like a silver bullet solution to plastic litter, but in fact, it's part of the problem. The facility will convert plastics into diesel and other fuels that when burned will create more greenhouse gases while perpetuating our dependence on plastics.





Okefenokee Swamp lovers have been vocal in their opposition to a proposed heavy mineral sands mine in Charlton County that presents a grave threat to the swamp. More than 40,000 people have sent e-mails to Georgia's Environmental Protection Division asking them to save the swamp while Gov. Brian Kemp's office has fielded more than 10,000 e-mails and phone calls on the issue.

In Charlton County, the ongoing fight over a proposed heavy mineral sands mine near the Okefenokee Swamp returns to the list. In the past year, more than 40,000 e-mails have been sent to EPD and more than 10,000 e-mails and phone calls have been received by Gov. Brian Kemp's office urging the state to stop this mine. Its future rests with EPD which will soon decide whether to issue environmental permits for this controversial proposal that has drawn international attention.

While the wreck of the Golden Ray cargo ship has finally been removed from St. Simons Sound, the long-term impacts of the maritime disaster remain unclear. Coastal advocates are calling on Georgia officials to request a Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA) by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The process would involve a thorough evaluation of the damage done to the Sound and surrounding areas and hold responsible parties accountable.

Also on the coast, a legacy pollution problem returns to the list in the form of the Hercules 009 Landfill Superfund site in Brunswick. Since the 1990s, a landfill operated by Hercules adjacent to the Golden Isles Parkway has leached benzene and other toxic chemicals into groundwater. Recent testing suggests that the contaminants are migrating in groundwater to adjacent properties.

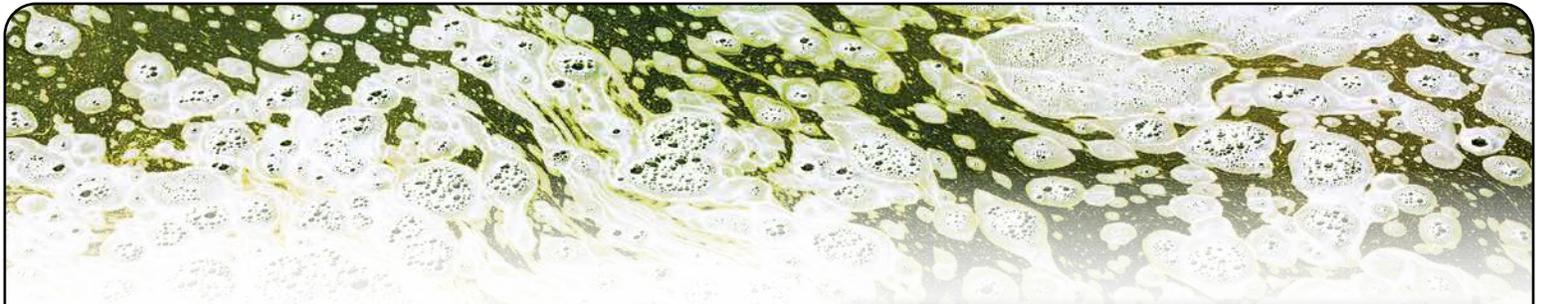
Notably new to the report this year is the issue of climate change and how Georgia's elected officials have been mostly silent and inactive on this problem. Two additional issues highlighted in the report are directly related to climate change or are exacerbated by our changing climate.

While Georgia is considered one of the state's most vulnerable to climate change, it is also one of the least prepared states to deal with the public health impacts of climate change, according to a recent study by the Trust of America's Public Health. In particular, Georgia's elected officials have been slow to embrace policies that transition the state toward cleaner energy sources.

Yet, at the same time state leaders seem to have embraced a proposed plastics rendering plant in Macon. Said to be the largest plastics "recycling" facility in the nation, the proposed plant would take plastics and break them down to diesel and other fuels. What seems like a silver bullet for the plastics pollution problem is, in fact, part of the problem, generating more greenhouse gases through the production, transformation and ultimate burning of fossil-fuel-based plastics, while perpetuating our dependence on plastics.

And, finally, there's one pollution problem that is likely to get worse with climate change: harmful algal blooms that thrive in nutrient-rich water and warm temperatures. Earlier this year, a family pet died after coming in contact with cyanobacteria at Bull Sluice Lake on the Chattahoochee River in Roswell. Since then, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper has identified two more locations on the river's reservoirs with harmful algal blooms. Nutrients washing off the land from thousands of sources make this a particularly difficult problem to fix; it will take the efforts of literally millions of individuals.





The final four items in the report are old pollutants we're all too familiar with in Georgia—dirt, industrial spills, chicken manure and textile plant waste.

In Fayetteville, local residents and Flint Riverkeeper have filed a lawsuit against Trilith, the operators of a mix-used development associated with one of the largest film production studios in the nation. Dirt from the development is regularly washing into Whitewater Creek and Bennett Lake, destroying the lake and residents' use and enjoyment of it. Homeowners that bought into the Crystal Lake subdivision on Bennett Lake are now dealing with a muddy mess that continues to get worse.

At Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, a series of jet fuel, de-icing fluid and sewage spills have caused fish kills in the Flint River, which, to the surprise of many, courses through pipes and culverts for about two miles underneath the airport and its five runways. River advocates are calling for the airport to eliminate these needless insults to a river that has already suffered the expense of Atlanta building the world's busiest airport.

In North Georgia's Gordon County, residents and chicken producers are squaring off over mega chicken houses. As the demand for poultry has grown so has the demand for efficient production methods. As a result, Georgia's chicken farms have gotten larger, as has the concentration of chicken manure and the odors it brings. But, more is at stake than just nuisance odors. The manure is contributing to algal blooms in downstream reservoirs in the Coosa River system and has the potential to foul private drinking water supplies.

Finally, along Georgia's Conasauga and Oostanaula rivers history is repeating itself. When carpet manufacturers polluted those streams with dyes in the 1960s and 70s, the City of Calhoun abandoned its drinking water intake on the Oostanaula and spent millions developing a new supply on a less polluted waterway. Now an invisible pollutant—PFAS, used to make carpet stain resistant and known to cause human health problems—has caused the City of Rome to stop using its water intake on the Oostanaula and have prompted legal action against carpet manufacturers. Meanwhile, PFAS continue to pollute our drinking water because Georgia's environmental regulators have not placed limits on how much of these contaminants can be discharged to our rivers.

Addressing the issues highlighted in this report through stronger enforcement of clean water laws, legislative action and sound permitting and policy decisions by state and federal agencies will ultimately lead to cleaner, healthier streams, rivers, lakes and estuaries. Of course, responsible actions by individuals, businesses, industries and local governments are also critical to solving these pollution problems.

The Georgia Water Coalition is a consortium of more than 285 conservation and environmental organizations, hunting and fishing groups, businesses and faith-based organizations that have been working to protect Georgia's water since 2002. Collectively, these organizations represent thousands of Georgians.



The Ocmulgee River flows through Central Georgia as the largest coal-fired power plant in the nation looms on the horizon. Coal ash stored in unlined pits at Plant Scherer in Monroe County is polluting groundwater as it is at three other coal-fired power plants along the Chattahoochee River. Georgia's Environmental Protection Division is poised to allow Georgia Power Company to keep its coal ash in these unlined pits rather than forcing them to remove it to safe, lined landfills.

