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**Leading Water Protection Coalition Announces
Clean Water Celebration to Honor Water Heroes**

Clean water heroes from across the state were recognized for their extraordinary work to protect Georgia's water during the Georgia Water Coalition's 20th Anniversary & Clean 13 Celebration on May 22, 2022 at Fall Line Station in Macon. The event, with 125 in attendance celebrated the 20th Anniversary of the Georgia Water Coalition and featured an awards ceremony. Read the report and learn about the awardees at <https://www.gawater.org/clean-13>.

The celebration honored: Athens-Clarke County, Blue Bird Bus Corporation, City of Savannah, City of South Fulton, Georgia Audubon and Southern Conservation Trust, Madison County Clean Power Commission, Mitchell County 4-H, Hanwha QCELLS North America, Dr. Dionne Hoskins-Brown, Patagonia, Rep. Andy Welch and Sen. Chuck Hufstetler, White Oak Pastures and Jim Wright.

The work celebrated includes:

Athens-Clarke County

Athens-Clarke County has embraced clean energy by adopting a goal of making its entire community powered 100 percent by renewable energy sources by 2050. To do this, the city-county commission adopted an innovative funding mechanism to generate the cash needed to reach the goal. Now, solar arrays are popping up on fire station roofs and low-income neighborhoods are getting water and energy efficiency assistance.

Blue Bird Bus Corporation (Peach County)

In Ft. Valley, the Blue Bird Bus Corporation has become the country's leading manufacturer of electric school buses and expects that by 2030 nearly 100 percent of its sales will be for electric and alternative fuel buses. By eliminating greenhouse gas emissions, this trend will lead to cleaner air for today's school children and a more livable world for future generations.

City of Savannah (Chatham County)

In Savannah where visitors are often seen strolling the streets of the entertainment and historic districts with drinks in hand, the city partnered with local restaurants and bars in on a pilot project to replace plastic to-go cups with infinitely-recyclable, Georgia-made aluminum cups. The pilot was so successful that additional restaurants are buying in and consumers are

clamoring for the cups, taking them home as souvenirs rather than tossing them in trash cans or recycling bins.

City of South Fulton (Fulton County)

In the City of South Fulton nestled along the Chattahoochee River, city leaders this year voted to make their municipality the first in Georgia to implement regulations prohibiting private businesses from using plastic bags. Other communities are watching and now following their lead.

Georgia Audubon and Southern Conservation Trust (Fayette County)

Near Fayetteville, Georgia Audubon and the Southern Conservation Trust are working at the micro-level, showing how little changes add up to big impacts. The two groups are partnering at Sams Lake Bird Sanctuary to eliminate invasive aquatic and terrestrial plants and restore native plants. The project is a lesson in the interconnectivity of our natural systems. The native plants produce more insects that benefit the 138 bird species that live in or annually visit the 56-acre sanctuary of wetlands and wildlife.

Madison County Clean Power Coalition (Madison and Franklin counties)

In rural Northeast Georgia residents rallied together to fight pollution from two local biomass-to-energy plants. When residents discovered the facilities were chipping and burning creosote-soaked railroad ties, they took action. Within a year, this small group of determined activists had secured state legislation banning the use of creosote-soaked wood at power generation facilities and held the polluting entities accountable.

Mitchell County 4-H (Camilla/Mitchell County)

In partnership with the Stripling Irrigation Research Park in Camilla, Mitchell County 4-H sponsors an annual 4-H2O camp to teach youth about the importance of the state's water resources. Since 2008, hundreds of children have participated, and now "graduates" of 4-H2O Camp are becoming science and water management leaders.

Hanwha QCELLS North America (Whitfield County)

In 2019, Dalton became home to the largest manufacturer of solar panels in the Western Hemisphere with the opening of Hanwha QCELLS facility which annually produces enough panels to generate 1.7 gigawatts (GW) of electricity. QCELLS chose the location, in part, because of the need to be close to the growing solar market in Georgia and the Southeast.

Dr. Dionne Hoskins-Brown (Chatham County)

Dr. Dionne Hoskins-Brown of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has become an advocate for Georgia's coastal waters and through a NOAA partnership with Savannah State University, Georgia's first public university for African Americans, is working to diversify NOAA's workforce. During the past 20 years, Hoskins-Brown's work has made the historically black university one of the nation's top producers of marine science graduates—some of whom are now working for NOAA studying how climate change is impacting fisheries and coastal communities.

Patagonia (Fulton County)

When it comes to supporting environmental advocacy and water protection efforts in Georgia, perhaps there is no business as committed to change as Patagonia. The iconic brand's retail store in Atlanta funds local environmental organizations, donates products to these groups and provides employee volunteers for multiple causes. Since 1996, the store has invested \$1.3 million in local environmental organizations.

Rep. Andy Welch and Sen. Chuck Hufstetler (Henry County and Floyd County)

Rep. Andy Welch (R-Locust Grove) and Sen. Chuck Hufstetler (R-Rome) took up the cause championed by the late Rep. Jay Powell of Camilla and during the 2020 General Assembly session successfully secured legislation that restores funding for the state's environmental trust funds. The legislation initiated a constitutional amendment on the 2020 ballot that was overwhelmingly supported by voters. During the 2021 legislation session, measures were adopted that will ensure that fees collected for environmental cleanups will be used for that purpose.

White Oak Pastures (Early County)

Will Harris and his team at White Oak Pasture's regenerative land management practices are proving their ability to sequester as much carbon as is produced by the livestock raised on the farm. The beef raised on the farm in Southwest Georgia's Bluffton community has a carbon footprint 111 percent lower than conventionally raised beef. The businesses' farming practices are protecting local creeks and improving the land.

Jim Wright (Lee County)

In Southwest Georgia's Lee County, code enforcement officer Jim Wright has become known for his work to clean Kinchafoonee and Muckalee creeks and make them accessible for residents and visitors for boating and fishing. Leading community cleanups, Boy Scout projects and development of public access points along the creeks, the Lee County employee and his community have transformed these waterways.

Together, the efforts of these "Clean 13" are adding up to cleaner rivers, stronger communities and a more resilient and sustainable future for Georgia.

The Georgia Water Coalition publishes this list not only to recognize these positive efforts on behalf of Georgia's water but also as a call to action for our state's leaders and citizens to review these success stories, borrow from them and emulate them.

Sponsors of the event included: Stack & Associates, Stripling Inc., Advanced Metal Components, Anonymous, Altamaha Riverkeeper, Southern Environmental Law Center, Little Saint Simons Island, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, Storm Water Systems, Georgia Aquarium, Rev. Sam Rogers, Georgia River Network, Environment Georgia, R2T, Tally Sweat, Fire Systems, Flint Riverkeeper, Terracon, Holly & Brian Markwalter, Graham Law Firm, American Rivers, Fish Dock Restaurant, R. Howard Dobbs Jr. Foundation, Sapelo Foundation and the Turner Foundation.

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.