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<https://www.gawater.org/clean-13>

**Leading Georgia Water Protection Coalition Announces
Clean Water Heroes in 2023 Clean 13 Report**

Today, Georgia’s leading water protection coalition released its Clean 13 report for 2023. The report highlights individuals, businesses, industries, non-profit organizations and governmental agencies whose extraordinary efforts have led to cleaner rivers, stronger communities and a more sustainable future for Georgians.

“In the past several years Georgia has seen all manner of threats to the state’s water resources—from the most expensive shipwreck recovery in U.S. history to a proposed heavy mineral sands mine that is expected to harm the Okefenokee Swamp,” said Jesse Demonbreun-Chapman, executive director with the Rome-based Coosa River Basin Initiative. “The entities recognized in this report have faced these threats head on and provided insight and solutions to meet them. Their actions are leading us toward a more resilient and sustainable future in every corner of the state.”

The work highlighted in the report includes:

Andy Jones (Glynn County)

When the Golden Ray cargo ship capsized in St. Simons Sound in September 2019, St. Simons Island native Andy Jones went into action. For the next two years, he spent part of every day documenting the disaster from his boat, *The Minorcan Mullet*. His citizen journalism grew into a YouTube channel with more than 11,000 followers and helped tell the untold story of the shipwreck’s impact on the Sound and surrounding beaches and marshes.

Ball Corporation (Floyd County)

A multi-national corporation with manufacturing facilities in Rome where they make aluminum cups and cans, Ball Corporation is attempting to displace ubiquitous single-use plastic cups from the marketplace and replace them with infinitely recyclable aluminum drink cups. The company is betting on consumers’ desire for more sustainable products and has set a lofty goal of seeing 90 percent of aluminum cans recycled worldwide. To that end, the company is investing not only in its new cup line but also in aluminum recycling efforts around the globe.

Rep. Darlene Taylor (Thomas County)

A republican lawmaker from Thomasville, Rep. Darlene Taylor has become the Georgia General Assembly's fiercest advocate for the protection of the Okefenokee Swamp as the largest blackwater wetland in North America faces the threat of a nearby heavy mineral sands mine. She has introduced a bill that would prohibit mining on portions of Trail Ridge, the sandy, geological rise on the swamp's east flank that helps regulate water levels within the swamp. Backed by more than half her fellow House members, she hopes the bill will win passage in the 2024 legislative session.

Harold Harbert (Fulton County)

Since 1998 in his capacity with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Adopt-A-Stream (AAS) program, Harold Harbert has studied Georgia's streams and trained his fellow Georgians to do the same. Each year, his team trains some 2,000 citizens to become watchdogs for streams in their backyard. Under his leadership, since 2004, the number of AAS stream health reports completed annually by volunteers has grown nearly 15 fold to more than 6500 events in 2022. His dedication to the state's volunteer water monitoring program has engaged citizens who in turn have helped identify and eliminate pollution problems.

Horsepen Creek Improvement Team (Camden County)

In a shining example of how the federal Clean Water Act is supposed to work, Camden County and a host of partners worked to eliminate pollution problems on Horsepen Creek and the St. Marys River and restore popular swimming holes. High bacteria levels in the creek, first identified by stream monitoring in the late 1990s, led to an effort, funded with federal Clean Water Act monies, that ultimately replaced 44 failing septic systems, educated the public on septic tank maintenance and realized a 92 percent reduction in fecal bacteria levels in Horspen Creek.

Kathleen Bowen and Association County Commissioners of Georgia (Fulton County)

For years, budget writers in the Georgia General Assembly looted funds intended for environmental cleanups and redirected those funds to other parts of the state budget—some \$210 million over a couple of decades. For just as many years Kathleen Bowen with the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) lobbied legislators to “put the trust back” in the state's environmental trust funds. The “theft” left hazardous waste sites polluting communities across the state and hampered local governments' ability to develop solid waste and recycling solutions. During the 2023 legislative session, Bowen and her colleagues successfully finished what had become a more than decade-long lobbying effort to dedicate these funds for their intended purposes. Today, funds are flowing back to the state's Solid Waste and Hazardous Waste Trust Funds.

Utility Scale Solar Siting Initiative (Newton County)

Massive solar “farms” are cropping up like peaches and cotton all over Georgia, and they are transforming the state's energy grid, producing clean energy to combat climate change, but

they are also transforming the state's landscape. If sited in the wrong locations or developed inappropriately, their impacts to natural resources can be as significant as any other large land development. Recognizing the need to minimize solar's impact to surrounding resources, a consortium of groups—from solar providers to environmental organizations—have come together to develop recommended practices for siting and developing utility-scale solar arrays.

Mark Wilson (Gwinnett County)

For years, Gwinnett Countian Mark Wilson lived in a subdivision that borrowed its name from the nearby Yellow River, but like many of his fellow residents, he knew little about his neighborhood stream. That all changed when he ventured out on it in a kayak and fell in love with it. Now, years later, Wilson's name is almost synonymous with the Yellow River. A leader in the effort to develop the Yellow River Water Trail, he organizes cleanups, conducts regular water testing and leads paddle trips on the river, helping connect more citizens with this vital suburban Atlanta waterway.

Partnership for the Upper Coosa (Northwest Georgia)

For the past five years, non-profit organizations and state and local agencies have worked cooperatively to secure funding to restore and protect the rare aquatic species of the Upper Coosa River basin in Northwest Georgia. The intentional group effort has helped garner more than \$4.5 million in investments, resulting in the stabilization of streambanks to prevent erosion; removal of culverts to reconnect habitat for fish; propagation and reintroduction of imperiled mussel species; and education programs targeting local schools. By collaborating rather than competing for limited funds, the partnership is saving the unique fish and mussels that make the upper Coosa one of the country's most biologically diverse river systems.

Peachtree City Water and Sewerage Authority (Fayette County)

Georgia's oldest planned community, Peachtree City is known for its sparkling lakes, rolling golf courses and some 100 miles of recreational trails where golf carts are the preferred means of in-town travel. But like any other community, beneath these notable amenities, is a sewer system, that if not functioning properly, can ruin the idyllic setting. With that in mind, the Peachtree City Water and Sewerage Authority recently invested in a cellular-based monitoring system for its 200 miles of sewer lines and 36 pump stations. The investment has helped eliminate sewage spills and saved the authority time and money, by reducing electrical demand and eliminating overtime hours associated with monitoring and repairing faulty pump stations.

Rural Georgia Protection Alliance (Madison, Oglethorpe, Wilkes, Warren and Elbert counties)

For years, county commissioners in rural Northeast Georgia have fielded complaints from constituents about foul smelling "fertilizers" being applied to neighboring farms. Upon investigation, the elected officials learned that these "fertilizers" fell under the generously descriptive name of "soil amendments," were regulated by Georgia's Department of Agriculture and that little could be done to remedy the smelly problem. But in 2022, a fish kill in Wilkes County creek caused by "soil amendment" runoff galvanized local leaders who banded together to lobby state legislators and the Department of Agriculture to amend their soil amendment

oversight. Changes have been implemented and now the local leaders of the Rural Georgia Protection Alliance remain cautiously optimistic.

Sanford Bishop (Dougherty County)

A congressman since 1992 and a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee, Rep. Sanford Bishop has used his influence to secure millions of dollars in federal support to remedy two of the most pressing problems threatening the Flint River's ability to sustain Southwest Georgia's agriculture-based economy and continue to serve as a recreational mecca for residents and visitors: overuse of the Floridan aquifer and pollution caused by Albany's aging and inadequate sewer system. These appropriations aim to restore flows in Radium Springs, a 70,000 gallon-a-minute spring that is known as one of Georgia's seven natural wonders, and aid the City of Albany in eliminating sewage overflows into the Flint.

Stevens Hill Inc. (Liberty County)

In Liberty County on the Georgia coast, the Stevens family has stewarded some 10,000 acres of marsh, maritime and upland forest since the mid-1900s. As the expansion of the Port of Savannah spawns a warehouse building boom along the I-95 corridor, the land stands as a bulwark against the tidal wave of warehouses. With 430 acres set aside as a nature center for public use and the rest preserved as a living laboratory for scientists and researchers, the Stevens family hopes that the property can be used to show the value of unmolested land and inform future land use policies and decisions to better protect the highly productive, but fragile, coastal ecosystem.

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.

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.