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Contact:

Jesse Demonbreun-Chapman, 678-978-4665

Fletcher Sams, 404-985-9806

Chris Manganiello, 706-614-8698

GEORGIANS ACTING ON TOXIC COAL ASH Movement Underway at State & Federal Levels

ATLANTA, GA (March 7, 2024)—Environmental groups and elected officials are working on multiple fronts to protect Georgia’s clean water and communities from toxic coal ash.

Coal ash, the waste leftover from burning coal to generate electricity, is toxic. Coal ash contains harmful metals, like mercury and arsenic, and other dangerous chemicals. These chemicals become even more dangerous when they enter our water supplies. For decades, Georgia Power Company has stored toxic coal ash in leaking pits next to rivers and lakes, and the company plans to permanently dispose of coal ash in the state’s groundwater.

At the state Capitol, legislators introduced a resolution urging the Georgia Environmental Protection Division to protect the state’s groundwater from toxic coal ash. Representative Mary Frances Williams (D-Marrietta) and five additional representatives introduced [House Resolution 1298](#) last week. The resolution calls on “the Georgia Environmental Protection Division to protect Georgia’s groundwater and the health of its citizens by denying Georgia Power Company’s waste handling permit applications regarding the disposal of coal ash under the state’s coal combustion residuals rule.”

Meanwhile, the Georgia Water Coalition, the state’s largest environmental and conservation coalition, is seeking help from Georgia’s senators in Washington, D.C. The Coalition sent a letter identifying the threat coal ash poses for Georgia’s water quality and requests help initiating a federal U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) review of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division’s (EPD) Coal Combustible Residual (CCR) and ash pond closure permitting program.

The U.S. EPA recently called the Georgia EPD’s program into question. On November 13, 2023, Georgia’s EPD issued a close-in-place permit at Plant Hammond for Ash Pond 3 on the banks of the Coosa River knowing that toxic coal ash would be left in contact with groundwater. Given that U.S. EPA has previously stated that “surface impoundments cannot be closed if, once closure is complete, the coal ash continues to be saturated by groundwater,” it remains unclear what will happen next at Plant Hammond and at other facilities.

Georgia EPD is also evaluating Georgia Power's similar plans to leave coal ash in place in unlined pits at power plants along the Chattahoochee and Ocmulgee rivers. At 4 different power plants on these rivers, Georgia Power is seeking permission from Georgia EPD to leave toxic coal ash in contact with groundwater, which risks long-term contamination of groundwater and potential leaching of contaminated groundwater into adjacent surface waters.

"Federal law is clear," said Jesse Demonbreun-Chapman, Executive Director of Coosa River Basin Initiative, "Coal ash cannot be left in groundwater to perpetually threaten us and future generations of Georgians. It must be excavated and stored in permitted, lined landfills away from groundwater and surface waters."

"While the most recent letter from EPA is encouraging," said Fletcher Sams, Executive Director of Altamaha Riverkeeper, "What Georgians need is for EPA to take action immediately to begin the process of revoking EPD's delegated authority to manage its own coal ash program."

"Georgia Power is seeking approval of coal ash clean-up plans that may already be failing," said Chris Manganiello, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper's Water Policy Director. "The company has reported contaminants moving around in groundwater and off-site."

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About the Georgia Water Coalition:

The Georgia Water Coalition, an alliance of more than 260 organizations committed to ensuring that water is managed equitably for all Georgians and protected for future generations. The coalition was formed in 2002 to bring together concerned citizens and groups from around the state. The Georgia Water Coalition produces a report every two years outlining its recommendations for water management in Georgia.

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