On the verge of a clean water victory

Congress putting our waterways at risk

America is on the verge of winning major new protections for countless miles of streams that feed Georgia’s most treasured waterways. But just as President Obama is about to sign off on the biggest clean water victory for our country in decades, some polluter-friendly members of Congress are doing everything they can to block him.

Biggest victory in a decade

From the Chattahoochee to the Savannah River, and all the smaller waterways in between, Georgians care deeply about our state’s waterways. But despite their popularity, for many years our waterways have not been nearly as protected or as safe as they once were.

Thanks to two polluter-driven Supreme Court decisions in the last decade, nearly 60 percent of our streams—including many that feed into cherished waterways like the Chattahoochee—may not have been protected by the Clean Water Act.

Thankfully, last April, the Obama administration proposed new guidelines to restore protections to many of Georgia’s waterways, including those smaller waterways that feed and filter our most beloved rivers and lakes.

Environment Georgia and allied groups across the country played a critical role in getting the administration to act—from talking to more than half a million people about the issue last year to gathering 88,000 public comments in support of the proposed guidelines to mobilizing more than 500 local elected officials, farmers and recreational businesses early this year.

In February, the administration announced that it was in the last stage before officially finalizing these protections. But our work is not done. As we build support for the president to finalize the guidelines, many in Congress are working to stop us. In fact, at press time, there were four separate rollback attempts in the House and Senate.

We are excited that the Obama administration is about to take this historic step to protect our waterways. Thanks to the support of our members across the country, we will soon have a victory we can all celebrate.

take action

Jennette Gayer speaks with the media about coal-fired power plants in Georgia, which draw copious amounts of water from our rivers and lakes to use as a coolant.

www.EnvironmentGeorgia.org
To our members

You can be remembered as someone who cared enough to keep up the fight for a cleaner, greener, healthier future by making a bequest to Environment Georgia or the Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center.

For information, call: 1-800-841-7299, or email PlannedGiving@EnvironmentGeorgia.org.

Recent action

**Plant Washington: On life support**

This February, with the strong support of Environment Georgia, Cobb Electric Membership Corporation yanked its financial support for a new coal plant in Sandersville.

Between 2001 and 2008, Cobb EMC invested $13.5 million in constructing that and one other coal-fired power plant. Now that they have pulled out, only four much smaller utilities remain that back the new plants.

Following Cobb’s February announcement, Environment Georgia joined the Sierra Club and other coalition partners to deliver more than 1,000 Valentines to Cobb EMC, thanking them for stopping investments in dirty coal.

“The promise of clean air and water really was a great Valentine that all Georgians could enjoy,” said Jennette Gayer, state advocate with Environment Georgia.

**New report: It’s time to build better**

By 2030, Georgia families could save more than $500 every year on their electricity bills if we invest in the energy efficiency of our buildings today, according to a new report by Environment Georgia. Saving energy in our buildings would also help Georgia’s fight against global warming, reducing global warming pollution from buildings by 18 percent.

Right now, 40 percent of the energy used in America goes to heat, cool and power our buildings. And because much of this energy comes from dirty and dangerous sources like coal, oil, natural gas and nuclear power, this accounts for nearly half of global warming pollution in the country. Furthermore, much of this energy is wasted, flying out of leaky doors and windows.

“It’s time to build better,” said Environment Georgia State Advocate Jennette Gayer. “Bold efficiency measures for buildings can cut energy use in our homes and businesses by 2030, reducing pollution and saving consumers money.”

How do you want to be remembered?

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Green roofs, like this one in Chicago, are a great way for new buildings to save energy and money.
Outstanding river campaign revived

This Spring, Environment Georgia re-filed a petition to designate the Conasauga River as an Outstanding National Resource Water, the highest level of protection identified in the Clean Water Act.

If successful, our efforts would make the Conasauga River Georgia’s first river with this significant protection. And to date, Georgia is the only southeastern state yet to protect any of its most treasured waterways in this way.

Designation as an Outstanding National Resource Water provides protections against both point and non-point sources of pollution, prohibiting new pipes from discharging in the river and instituting strong, sensible rules to limit runoff from developments.

“The Conasauga River deserves to be Georgia’s first Outstanding National Resource Water,” said Jennette Gayer, Environment Georgia advocate. “The headwaters of the Conasauga support one of the most biodiverse river ecosystems in the country, plus it is a truly breathtaking part of our state to visit and enjoy.”

First petition filed in 2007

With the support of small businesses, nonprofits and local governments, the petition was originally filed in 2007. Unfortunately, our coalition hit several road bumps along the road—especially as Georgia’s Environmental Protection Division grappled with the procedural challenges of designating outstanding rivers.

And so, for the past five years, Environment Georgia worked with the agency, other nonprofits, stake-holders and representatives from the National Park Service and Forest Service to clarify and upgrade the never-before-used protocols.

Cool, clean waters of the Conasauga

The Conasauga starts in the Chattahoochee National Forest and runs up to the Tennessee border. The ONRW designation would begin at the headwaters of the river, which lie within the Cohutta Wilderness Area, and end before the Alaculsy Valley, a few miles before the Georgia-Tennessee state line.

Cool, clean waters support outstanding paddling and trout fishing and feed a downstream snorkeling hole where outdoor enthusiasts can sneak a peak at more than 90 different fish species and 25 species of freshwater mussels. Twelve of these fish and mussel species are federally designated as endangered or threatened species.

This summer, if all goes according to plan, EPD will accept our re-petition, hold a public comment period, public meetings and ultimately a vote at the Board of the Department of Natural Resources.

In the meantime, you can visit our website to send the Board an email, and urge them to properly protect this pristine waterway.

EPA moves to cut carbon pollution from power plants

On March 27, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed limits on carbon pollution from new power plants. If passed, they will be the first nationwide limits on the largest single source of the carbon pollution that fuels global warming.

As scientists, doctors and other experts have been warning us for years, cutting this carbon pollution is critical because global warming will bring everything from dirtier air and more deadly heat waves, to more devastating floods and extreme weather.

Unfortunately, the real battle began after the EPA’s announcement, as utilities, coal companies and other corporate polluters began spending millions to convince the Obama administration to weaken or abandon the standards altogether.

Today, our on-the-ground organizers are gathering tens of thousands of public comments in support of the standards, holding press events to help raise the profile of the issue, and reaching out to public health groups and local environmental groups to demonstrate broad support.

“Through ads, the polluters are trying to scare the public into thinking that we can’t afford to adopt these commonsense standards,” said Environment Georgia Advocate Jennette Gayer. “We’ll be there to set the record straight.”

Visit our website, www.EnvironmentGeorgia.org, to find our more.
Ga. senators vote for open space funding

This March, Environment Georgia staff visited with Georgia's congressional delegation to discuss our most important federal priorities, including funding key open space programs, which could go to work preserving vulnerable land across the Appalachian Trail.

Days later, the U.S. Senate voted on an amendment to fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund to the tune of $700 million—up by more than 100 percent from 2011, with support from both Sens. Johnny Isakson and Saxby Chambliss.

Money from last year's LWCF funds is already being spent in Georgia. Three tracts totaling 548 acres will be added to national forest lands and preserved, including 100 acres in the Chattahoochee National Forest in Gilmer County. The properties were near or on rivers, and provide habitat for important wildlife, like the endangered red cockaded woodpecker. Riverside property is often attractive to developers, so procuring these parcels will permanently protect watersheds and habitat.

Red cockaded woodpecker

Environment Georgia built support for a preservation program that ultimately won funding to preserve 548 acres of previously vulnerable forest.