From fish kills to pulp mills

From the coal-fired power plants in northwest Georgia to the pulp mills that churn in the southeast, Georgia’s water continues to face persistent threats. This November, Environment Georgia joined its allies in the Georgia Water Coalition (GWC) to release a new report titled “Georgia’s Dirty Dozen,” shining a light on our waters’ worst polluters.

A textile plant in Screven County topped our list, having been blamed for pollution that killed 30,000 fish in the Ogeechee River. Across the state, threats range from new reservoirs to proposed coal plants—and in the coming weeks and months, Environment Georgia will join allied groups to defend our waters, from the Chattahoochee to the Savannah River.

“This is more than a list,” said Jennette Gayer, Environment Georgia’s policy advocate. “This is a call to action for Georgia’s citizens and its leaders. The sites populating this list are only poster children for the larger problem of a system that is failing to protect our water, our fish and wildlife and our communities.”

Budget shortfalls impede enforcement
The Georgia Water Coalition has pinpointed the ongoing budget cuts to Georgia’s Department of Natural Resources (DNR)—the state agency charged with enforcing clean water laws across the state—as a serious part of the threats facing our rivers.

Since 2008, the coalition has found, the DNR has seen its funding slashed by nearly half. Further, many of the people in the agency’s leadership have industry ties, which might prevent them from cracking down on some of our waters’ most persistent polluters.

“It’s too often in Georgia, the fox is watching the hen house,” said Sally Bethea, coalition partner and director of the Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper. “Some of the problems on this list have been happening for decades, and the agency that is supposed to fix the problems can’t, or won’t.”

In the weeks and months ahead, Environment Georgia will be working in Atlanta with our allies, urging state leaders to address the DNR’s shortcomings—and make meaningful progress for Georgia’s waters.
I’ve got good news, bad news and better news. First the good news. As we closed the book on 2011 and began 2012 we had the chance to celebrate three real victories: ground-breaking standards to get cleaner cars on the road, to cut mercury pollution, and an announcement from an energy company called LS Power cancelling plans to build a new coal-fired power plant in Southwest Georgia.

The bad news? Polluters are using our hard-won victories as an excuse to roll back progress. In the fall, there were nearly 200 votes in the U.S. House to roll back the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and much more.

Fortunately, there’s better news. We know that Georgians care deeply about our air and water, our families’ health and the places we love. When people come together, we almost always find a way to win.

Thanks for joining us.

Jennette Gayer, Advocate

Attorney General opposes new mercury rules

As the Obama administration finalized its new rule to slash mercury pollution from power plants, Attorney General Sam Olens attempted to delay the new rules’ implementation—and leave Georgians vulnerable to this hazardous pollution, commonly linked to birth defects and other health risks.

Environment Georgia, together with its national federation, Environment America, vigorously supported these new standards, which will cut mercury pollution by 90 percent and save an estimated 11,000 lives every year. When Attorney General Olens announced his intentions to delay the rules, Environment Georgia Advocate Jennette Gayer responded with an open letter, urging him to embrace the standards. More than a dozen organizations signed the document.

White House’s clean cars proposal moves forward

This summer, the Obama administration announced a plan to require cars and trucks to meet a 54.5 miles per gallon standard by 2025. In November, the administration opened a public comment period on the proposed standards—the first step toward making them a reality.

The standards mark the biggest step America has ever taken to fight global warming—and many additional benefits will result as well. By 2025, American families will use 23 billion fewer gallons of oil and save $45 billion at the pump annually. Our report, “Gobbling Less Gas for Thanksgiving,” spelled out how much American families would have saved during the holidays if the standards were in effect today.

With the National Auto Dealers Association lobbying to weaken the new standards, and their allies in Congress vowing to block them, this victory is not yet a done deal. Our staff, members and allies are working to make sure this important opportunity to get America off oil and stop global warming becomes reality.

Coal-fired Plant Bowen in Cartersville, GA. The EPA’s new mercury standard will slash emissions from power plants by 90 percent.
Calling out the worst polluters of Georgia’s waterways

This November, Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center released a new report revealing our 12 most polluted waters, and the problems that afflict them. The “dirty dozen,” listed below, fan across the state, and range from our most iconic rivers to lesser-known creeks. In the year ahead, Environment Georgia will continue working with a broad range of coalition partners to address these problems and restore our waters.

Ogeechee River: For five years, King America Finishing Inc. has discharged toxic substances to the Ogeechee River without the state’s knowledge or approval.

Altamaha River: For over a half-century Rayonier’s Jesup pulp mill has discharged noxious waste into the state’s largest river, the Altamaha, altering its character by turning the water black, pulpy and malodorous.

Savannah River: Harbor deepening projects on the Savannah during the past century have destroyed two-thirds of its 12,000 acres of freshwater wetlands. Now, the Port Authority would like to deepen the harbor more.

Chattahoochee River: Though the Environmental Protection Department established pollution limits for the Chattahoochee at Peachtree Creek, near a sewage treatment plant, they have never attempted to enforce them.

Shoal Creek and Flat Creek: The Glades Reservoir and the Shoal Creek Reservoir will siphon massive quantities of water from the Chattahoochee River.

Oconee and Ogeechee Rivers: A proposed coal-fired power plant in Washington County will spew more mercury into our air and water and deplete flows on the Oconee and Ogeechee rivers.

Flint River: Flows on the upper Flint River have declined 50 to 70 percent, while flows on the lower Flint have dropped by around 30 percent.

Coastal Wetlands: Federal and state entities have permitted the construction of thousands of docks in Georgia’s 450,000 acres of tidal marshes.

South Georgia Wetlands: Since the 1970s, state and federal agencies have allowed the destruction of more than 200,000 acres of critical wetlands throughout south Georgia.

Broad River: Broad River Valley Farms each week spreads approximately 30 tractor-trailer loads of waste—including livestock excrement, animal parts and grease—on land adjacent to Broad River.

Brier and Commissioner Creeks: In September and October, Commissioner Creek and Brier Creek began changing color after receiving wastewater from kaolin mines and processing facilities.

Coosa River: In the late summer, Georgia Power’s Plant Hammond burns coal to keep residents cool—and withdraws up to 590 million gallons a day from the Coosa River.

Interview:
EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson

The EPA has recently worked on several clean air standards including the Mercury and Air Toxics Standard and the Cross-State Air Pollution Rule. Can you explain what these standards mean for the average family?

These new Clean Air Act standards mean cleaner, healthier air for American families. The Mercury and Air Toxics Standard and the Cross-State Air Pollution Rule are part of a series of common sense steps under the Clean Air Act to reduce emissions of mercury, acid gas, particulate matter, arsenic and other harmful chemicals from some of the biggest polluters in the nation.

These reasonable steps will provide dramatic protections to our children and loved ones—they will save tens of thousands of lives and prevent hundreds of thousands of asthma and heart attacks.

What’s the best way for our supporters to express their opinions on these issues?

Unfortunately, we are at a point where we have to remind some leaders in Washington to put the health of their constituents above the wish lists of special interests. Speaking directly to those who want to undermine common sense environmental protections is one of the best ways to stand up for your right to clean air and clean water.

For the full interview, visit www.EnvironmentGeorgia.org/page/GAE/Lisa-Jackson-interview

Visit our website to read the entire “Dirty Dozen” report.
www.EnvironmentGeorgia.org/reports
A win for Georgia’s forests

In a tremendous victory for Georgia’s national forests, and those across the country, a federal appeals court reaffirmed protections for nearly 50 million acres of undisturbed wilderness, upholding the Clinton-era Roadless Area Conservation Rule. The law has spent the past decade tied up in the federal court system—and this November’s ruling was an important step to protecting forests, from Georgia’s Appalachian Mountains to the Rockies. Our nation’s forests are not only a beautiful part of our natural heritage, but they provide clean air and shelter critical water supplies; contain essential habitat for wildlife; and provide opportunities for Georgians to connect with nature.

“Fifteen years ago, when President Bill Clinton first introduced the Roadless Rule, nearly 2 million Americans spoke out in favor of these strengthened protections,” said Jennette Gayer, advocate for Environment Georgia. “The recent ruling is a victory not only for conservation groups, but for citizens across the country.”

Hiker on the Appalachian Trail in Georgia. Visit our website, www.EnvironmentGeorgia.org, to read more about our efforts to preserve Georgia’s forests, from the Chattahoochee National Forest to land surrounding the Appalachian Trail.