Holding the line for Atlanta’s best places

Grassroots efforts defend Chattahoochee parks

This summer, Environment Georgia worked in neighborhoods around Atlanta to advocate for critical conservation funding that has helped create and, most recently, expand parks along the Chattahoochee River.

After years of advocating for funding that would help the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area expand from the park’s current footprint of 6,500 acres to 10,000 acres, we started to see some progress. The park was able to use funds from the critical Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to purchase nearly 50 acres of prime riverfront greenspace currently at risk of development.

Over the course of three months, we collected more than 5,000 petitions calling on our senators to fight for full and dedicated funding. Our grassroots work on this issue will continue this fall.

“Holding the line for Georgia’s natural heritage is a key part of our mission,” said Jennette Gayer, Environment Georgia advocate. “That’s why standing by as shortsighted members of Congress attempt to zero out funding for the LWCF, our most successful parks and open space program, simply isn’t an option for us.”

A 50-year legacy
Places like the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, the Appalachian Trail and the Okefenokee Swamp are a big part of what makes living in Georgia great. They’re where we go to spend time with friends and family, to hike, camp, swim, and see wildlife. They’re treasured destinations and key parts of our natural heritage.

Yet if some in Congress get their way, the program with a more than 50-year history could evaporate altogether, leaving outdoor places we love in Georgia and across the country with less protection.

Educating young advocates
Along with our grassroots push we also worked with local summer camps to educate young people about the importance of parks—not only as places to visit but also as important protections for rivers and streams, and a home to wildlife. We also worked with kids from ages eight to 13 to write letters and draw pictures urging Georgia’s senators to support these parks.

To take action to protect Chattahoochee parks, visit: www.EnvironmentGeorgia.org

Environment Georgia campaign staff collected more than 5,000 petitions in support of protecting our parks.
This past summer was a whirlwind. Our citizen outreach staff talked to people across the state and collected thousands of petition signatures to protect Georgia's special places. We’ve made so much progress, and we owe that success to members like you.

Now, as fall gets underway, it’s important to remember another important aspect of the movement for a cleaner, greener Georgia: Electing leaders who will do the right thing for our environment. Elections can have huge implications, and if our elected officials are willing to stand up for clean air, clean water and open spaces, we stand a far better chance of winning lasting improvements.

So, if you haven’t done so already, I encourage you to make plans to vote, and to bring family and friends with you to the polls. It’s our environment and our future—let’s get out there and vote!

Sincerely,
Jennette Gayer
State Advocate

Groundbreaking step to tackle global warming

In June, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed a Clean Power Plan that sets targets for states to reduce global warming pollution from power plants by investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency, cleaning up existing power plants, and switching to cleaner fuels.

The EPA held four hearings to take feedback on the rule, including a two-day hearing in Atlanta. Environment Georgia played a critical role turning out members to show support for the Clean Power Plan, recruiting farmers and small businesses that could voice their support, and organizing a rally and march in favor of action to curtail the pollution that causes global warming.

Environment Georgia’s Jennette Gayer testified at the listening session and painted a picture of the benefits the plan could bring to our state: “Georgia has some of the most beautiful coastline in the nation, so when we talk about sea level rise and hurricanes getting worse, global warming hits close to home. We’re also talking about economic impact—tourism experts estimate our coast is worth $1.5 billion.”

Georgia ranked 10th in nation for installed solar

An August report by Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center ranks Georgia 10th in installed solar capacity in 2013.

Our report, “Lighting the Way: The Top Ten States that Helped Drive America’s Solar Energy Boom in 2013,” emphasizes that it is not availability of sunlight that makes states solar leaders, but the degree to which state and local governments have created effective public policy to help capture the virtually unlimited and pollution-free energy from the sun.

Georgia saw a more than three-fold increase in solar in 2013 after state regulators required the state’s largest utility to construct or procure 525 MW of solar energy capacity by the end of 2016.
Industrial facilities dumped over 10 million pounds of toxic chemicals into Georgia’s waterways in 2012, making Georgia’s waterways the eighth worst in the nation according to a report by Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center released in June. The Savannah River and her tributaries received more than 5 million pounds of toxic pollution, making it the third worst in the country.

The “Wasting Our Waterways” report was released as the Environmental Protection Agency considered a new rule to restore Clean Water Act protections to thousands of waterways in Georgia and across the nation.

“Georgia’s rivers should be clean—for swimming, drinking, and supporting wildlife,” said Jennette Gayer, Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center advocate. “But too often, our waters have become a dumping ground for polluters. The first step to curb this tide of toxic pollution is to restore Clean Water Act protections to all our waterways.”

37 million lbs. of toxic chemicals
The Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center report on toxic pollutants discharged to America’s waters is based on data reported by polluting facilities to the EPA’s Toxics Release Inventory for 2012, the most recent data available.

Key findings from the report include:

• The Savannah River is ranked third in the nation for the highest amount of total toxic discharges with 5,025,161 pounds discharged in 2010.

• In the South Atlantic-Gulf region, polluters dumped 37,715,211 pounds of toxic chemicals into our waterways, making this watershed the second most polluted in the nation.

• Industrial facilities discharged approximately 55,565 pounds of chemicals linked to cancer into Georgia’s rivers—the 10th highest amount in the country.

An opportunity to act
As a result of court cases brought by polluters, nearly 40,000 miles of streams in Georgia and 4.9 million Georgians’ drinking water are now at risk of having no protection from pollution under the federal Clean Water Act. Following years of advocacy by Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center and its allies, this spring, the EPA finally proposed a rule to close the loopholes that have left Georgia’s waterways and risk and restore Clean Water Act protections.

But a wide range of polluting industries including large agribusiness and developers is vigorously opposing the clean water rule.

“Looking at the data from our report today, you can see why polluters might oppose it,” said Gayer. “That’s why we are working with farmers, small businesses, and thousands of ordinary Georgians to make sure our voices for clean water are heard in Washington, D.C. The future of the Savannah hangs in the balance.”

To learn more about our work on clean water, visit: www.EnvironmentGeorgiaCenter.org
Progress made to secure clean water victory

Late this spring, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed a rule to close loopholes in the Clean Water Act that have left more than half the nation’s streams and 117 million Americans’ drinking water at risk for more than a decade.

Not surprisingly, also shortly after the EPA’s announcement, big polluters spent the summer ramping up their efforts to block the rule, lobbying in Congress, spreading misinformation, and threatening “legal warfare.”

That’s why this summer, Environment Georgia delivered hundreds of petition signatures and shared a letter with over 50 Georgia farmers calling for a strong rule to protect streams and wetlands to the EPA. The fight is far from over, but we’re closing in on the finish line.

more online

Learn more about our work to restore Clean Water Act protections to Georgia’s rivers, lakes and streams at: www.EnvironmentGeorgia.org

Chattahoochee River