From our staff

Dear Environment Georgia member,

You and I both know that Georgia’s environment faces daunting challenges in the years ahead.

Rapid growth and development—among the fastest in the nation—is gobbling up our forests, farmlands and other green space, damaging wildlife habitat and polluting our rivers, lakes and streams. And if there is one thing this past year’s drought has taught us, it is that water is a finite resource.

Scientists predict more drought, more violent hurricanes, smoggier cities, and a vanishing coastline if the planet’s rising temperature is not held in check. Too much of our electricity comes from dirty, dangerous sources of energy, threatening our health and our energy independence.

As concerned as we are at Environment Georgia about the challenges Georgia faces, we are pragmatic and optimistic that we can overcome them. Big problems like these can’t be solved overnight, especially when powerful interests like developers and utility companies stand in our way. That’s why we work aggressively for incremental reforms—like bills to promote renewable fuels in the Legislature (page 5), or protection of the Conasauga, one of north Georgia’s pristine rivers (page 3).

In 2007, your support allowed us to achieve victories for the state’s environment and quality of life. It also allowed us to stand up and do what’s right for our air, water and green space. Thank you for making both possible.

Sincerely,

Jennette Gayer
Advocate

Environment Georgia
Clean Water

Cutting mercury pollution

Environment Georgia testified before the Department of Natural Resources and the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) to call for cuts in mercury pollution, a dangerous source of water pollution. Fish advisories have been issued for every lake and stream in Georgia that has been sampled. Fish have been caught in the state with twice the average concentration of mercury considered safe for women of childbearing age who eat fish twice a week.

Despite our advocacy, the EPD’s finalized rules for mercury pollution in the state have serious flaws. The final rules fail to cap mercury pollution at a specific level, allowing polluters to trade credits with other states. They also fail to address pollution levels at several plants altogether, and don’t adequately beef up mercury testing and monitoring. Environment Georgia will continue to advocate mercury-cutting policies in the year ahead.

Fish caught in the Chattahoochee River have tested positive for mercury contamination.
Environment Georgia launched our Treasured Rivers Campaign last year. Our goal was to identify unspoiled rivers in the state and pursue the highest level of protection for those waters.

Fortunately, Georgia has strong laws on the books that allow government officials to preserve and protect unspoiled waters. A clause in the Clean Water Act allows states to designate our most treasured rivers as “Outstanding National Resource Waters,” (ONRW). This designation provides protections from both point and non-point source pollution to ensure healthy rivers for future generations.

Georgia has yet to give this level of protection to any of our most treasured rivers, putting us behind every state in the Southeast, except Mississippi.
In June 2007, along with the Southern Environmental Law Center, we petitioned the state to designate the Conasauga River as the state’s first ONRW.

The headwaters of the Conasauga River support outstanding paddling and trout fishing, and feed a downstream snorkeling hole where outdoor enthusiasts can sneak a peak at the Conasauga’s impressive biodiversity.

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.

**Conasauga: A truly outstanding river**

Environment Georgia is leading a coalition of environmental, paddling and fishing groups, local business owners and residents to rally support for the Conasauga River’s special recognition. In the next year, we’ll work with our coalition to turn out support at public hearings and generate public comments. The vote on the Conasauga’s designation will happen in early 2008.

**Powerful coalition for preservation**

Fishing on Lake Conasauga.
A New Energy Future

A historic vote on clean energy

This past summer, we celebrated a watershed environmental vote in the 110th Congress. On Aug. 4, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a federal Renewable Energy Standard (RES).

Environment Georgia, working with other organizations in our federation, released several reports outlining the potential of renewable energy and the success of renewable energy standards in states around the country. We used the data from these reports to lobby Georgia’s congressional delegation and encouraged our members to weigh in at critical junctures along the way.

Under the legislation, utilities such as Georgia Power would have to get at least 15 percent of their electricity from wind, solar, biomass or other clean, homegrown, renewable sources by 2020.

Special thanks should go to Georgia Reps. John Lewis and Hank Johnson for voting in favor of the Renewable Energy Standard.

New coal plant a step backward

In May, Environment Georgia teamed up with Sierra Club to protest plans for a new coal-burning power plant—the first new coal-burning power plant to receive a permit in the state in 20 years. Along with a long list of dangerous air pollutants, this planned 1,200 megawatt power plant would release approximately 9 million tons of carbon dioxide every year, the equivalent of having about 1.3 million extra cars and trucks on the road every day.

Currently, the permit is being questioned in court, and a decision is expected by early 2008. Environment Georgia will continue to stand up against new coal plants.
In 2007, Georgia took several small but important steps toward renewable power, specifically fuels made from renewable sources such as the waste products of Georgia’s abundant pine tree farms. During the legislative session, the Legislature passed and the governor signed two bills supported by Environment Georgia. The first, sponsored by Sen. Ross Tolleson (Perry), provides grants to Georgians to aid the distribution and sale of ethanol. The second, sponsored by Rep. Jim Cole (Forsyth), gives tax breaks to alternative fuel facilities.

Environment Georgia backed the plans because using energy more efficiently and tapping our potential for solar, wind and biopower could supply electricity to our state and protect our environment at the same time. Environment Georgia will continue to advocate clean and sustainable bioenergy production in the state.
The end of smog?

When the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced they would hold one of only five public hearings on “smog” ozone pollution in Atlanta, Environment Georgia was quick to mobilize for controls that would mean less air pollution.

The American Lung Association gave grades of ‘F’ for ozone pollution levels to Fulton, DeKalb, Douglas, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale counties, home to over 30 percent of our state’s population.

We worked with groups such as the American Lung Association and Mothers and Others for Clean Air to turn out dozens of people to testify in favor of strong standards for smog.

The EPA will announce their decision early next year, but there is no doubt that they heard our message loud and clear—Atlantans are ready for an end to smog.

Children, senior citizens and people with lung disease are particularly vulnerable to smog.
Saving state parks
Jekyll Island, a state park that’s stated purpose is to provide a vacation destination for the average Georgian, was threatened by developers who proposed Hilton Head-like developments. Environment Georgia backed measures to preserve the southern end of Jekyll Island, which currently contains a 4-H facility used by school groups from all over the state, soccer fields, and pristine beaches that serve as nesting grounds for sea turtles. In the end, a compromise was reached when a bill with conservation amendments passed.

Stopping out-of-control development
Environment Georgia opposed legislation that would allow developers to levy taxes to pay for development projects. Unfortunately, the bill passed the Legislature and was signed by the governor. We opposed the bill on the grounds that such a practice would encourage sprawl, especially in rural counties that do not have the infrastructure or money to support a large development where a farm used to stand. In order to take effect, the measure will have to receive majority approval on the 2008 ballot. We'll be working to defeat the measure.

Georgia’s roadside landscape
Environment Georgia opposed a bill that would have allowed clear-cutting along our highways. The legislation was backed by the billboard industry and would give billboard owners the right to clear trees 500 feet in front of roadside advertisements.
Citizen support is the cornerstone of Environment Georgia and the Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center. Thousands of Environment Georgia citizens supported Environment Georgia by making membership contributions in fiscal year 2007. The members listed below were particularly generous in backing the organization’s research and advocacy. Names that appear in italics denote Monthly Supporters. These members provide stability to the organization’s resources through our monthly giving program.

**Development Committee**—contributed $500 or more.
Charles Bobo • Gail Hyde • John Merlino • Douglas H. Phelps • Todd Weinert

**Patrons**—contributed between $200 and $499.
Nadine Aitken • Susan Allen • Alex Amit • Meredith Bell • Brandyn Briley • Stuart Culpepper • Tom Darlow • Jerrold Dubner • Alicia Enamorado • Regina Etheridge • Michael Fizers • Richard Gerakitis • Gary & Susan Gimmestad • Brooke Green • Kathryn Hayes • Rebekah Hayes • Robert Hayes, Jr. • Brad Hepner • Mary Jones • Jenny Karns • Melissa Katz • Lauren King • Tim Lacy • Thomas Lau • Albert Lorenzo • Max Madara • Michael Mansour • Q. Adam Martin • Gary McCarthy • Donald Mead • Carol Minton • Kendall Newman • Timothy Nichols • Johanna Norry • Barbara O’Neil • Mary Robertson • Haynes Robinson • Linda Schnapper • Cynthia Sencis • Dale Sheafer • Miya Smith • Rob Smith • C. W. Taft • Rich Vengroff • Ramona White • Nancy Wholers

**Sponsors**—contributed between $150 and $199.
Felicitas Aguirar • Jeremy Benish • Emily Boness • Robert Bridges • Cathy Brink • Travis Brown • Michael Carey • Wayne Clinton • Mary Jo Deal • John Douglass • James Faulkner • Dexter Fletcher • Diana Gotz • Tom Gray • Marianne Grumby • Donald Hansen • Trish Haugaard • Leslie Hjeldness • Rhonda Hoffman • Robert Lazo • Jennifer Lee • Christopher Lee • Rebecca Mann • Maribeth McPhie • Daniel McKinley • Claudia Miron • Marty Monroe • Elise Nussbaum • Enrique Perez-Young • Donna Reed • Arthur Schneider • William Sheahan • Thomas Slaughter • Roxanne Smith • Donna Smith • Joe Sniezek • Michael Stamboly • Erica Taylor • Katherine Thomasset • Maria Titarenko • Valerie Trent • Tom Unwetterth • Velma Walker
Foundation Support
The Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center is a 501(c)(3) organization, and conducts research and public education on emerging environmental issues. Contributions to the Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center are tax-deductible. To find out more, contact Jennette Gayer at (404) 892-3573.

The Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center would like to thank the following foundations for supporting our work in fiscal year 2007: Clean Water Network • Educational Foundation of America • Sapelo Foundation

Financial Information
Charts reflect combined financial information for the environmental work conducted by Environment Georgia, the Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center and Environment Georgia's citizen outreach programs.

Photo Credits
*: Shutterstock.com, **: Creative Commons.