



Manage State Waters as a Resource

Improve Water Quality in Georgia's Streams, Creeks, and Rivers

Throughout Georgia, environmental organizations labor to develop and implement strategies to improve water quality in the state's streams, creeks, and rivers. Unfortunately, the return on this investment of time and energy is not nearly what it should be. Why has so much effort to improve water quality met with so little success?

One only needs to look to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GA EPD) website for an example of why progress has been so slow. Here the agency's Watershed Protection Branch clarifies how the organization acts and who the agency serves; the Georgia Environmental Protection Division "Watershed Protection Branch manages water resources in Georgia through permits to local governments and industry to discharge treated wastewater and to local governments, industry, farmers and subdivisions for surface water and groundwater withdrawals." This declaration not only clarifies the state's role when it comes to water resources, it also serves as the foundation for its lack of action relative to the protection of Georgia's rich surface water environments. It makes clear that the state views its responsibility as being limited to permitting pollution and water withdrawal.

Conspicuously absent from the Watershed Protection Branch's statement on the care of the most vital and threatened natural resource in the state is the mention of people or recreation or fishes and aquatic life, wildlife, or water quality needed to support these habitats. It excludes any reference to the protection of Georgia's rich surface water environments. Water is viewed as a commodity.

South River Watershed Alliance is in the planning stage of what the organization envisions will become a statewide campaign to chart a new direction for our streams, creeks, and rivers. This campaign will promote managing the state's surface waters as a resource.

Actions that manage waters as a resource rather than a commodity are different with different outcomes.

- **When We Manage State Waters as a Resource** water is valued as a natural amenity.
- **When We Manage State Waters as a Resource** the rights of citizens to enjoy their waterways is acknowledged and supported.
- **When We Manage State Waters as a Resource** water quality will be sufficient to sustain fishes and other aquatic life and wildlife.
- **When We Manage State Waters as a Resource** water quality will support recreational activities such as fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and swimming.

Nature is resilient and its ability to bounce-back is amazing. But in Georgia, our waterways are overwhelmed with pollution. Managing state waters as a resource makes use of regulatory enforcement and requires local governments, businesses, and farmers to meet permit requirements thus eliminating unsustainable dependence on nature's resilience.

South River Watershed Alliance is launching the *Manage State Waters as a Resource* campaign for one very important reason. The South River is one of the most threatened rivers in Georgia. This status will not change as long as water resources in the state are reduced to nothing more than a commodity and permits and other protections that should be afforded waterways are not enforced. Georgia is a “primacy” state which simply means that responsibility for implementing the U.S. Clean Water Act (Clean Water Act) is delegated to the State of Georgia by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This delegation of authority is a major contributing factor to unhealthy water quality in so many Georgia waterways.

As part of the federal Triennial Review required under the Clean Water Act, states must evaluate and, if necessary, revise their stream water quality standards. If permitting pollution and water withdrawal remains the only focus of the Watershed Protection Branch, water quality in our streams, creeks, and rivers will not improve. The Triennial Review, which will take place in early 2019, provides an important opportunity to begin charting a new direction for surface waters in Georgia. Water quality in our waterways will not significantly improve until people, fishes and aquatic life, wildlife, and the environment are given equal weight with municipalities, business, and agriculture and this parity is reflected in the actions of GA EPD.

Like the South River, there are many streams and rivers across Georgia that are in danger and very likely one of them is yours. This letter is being sent to you to determine your organization’s interest in supporting a statewide campaign that promotes managing water as a resource beginning with the upcoming Triennial Review.

Here is how you can help.

- To broaden the operation of GA EPD, Watershed Protection Branch participate in the Triennial Review and encourage GA EPD to include in its mission statement language that supports water quality, fishes and aquatic life, wildlife, and recreation.
- Help us create a data bank by sharing for the Triennial Review local sites where water quality violations have occurred or continue to occur due to lack of enforcement. South River Watershed Alliance will compile a list and submit to U. S. EPA and GA EPD.
- Suggest other ways we can promote *Manage State Waters as a Resource* through the Triennial Review period and all year long.

Please confirm your interest by return email to southernriverwatershedalliance@gmail.com. In the meantime, prepare for the 2019 Triennial Review. Share your suggestions and data. Thank you.

With appreciation,

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