



The mission of South River Watershed Alliance is to protect and restore the water quality and biodiversity of the South River watershed to the beneficial use of people and wildlife.

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Backsliding Focus of SRWA Review of Proposed Permit

SRWA Members and Supporters: *Below is the press release SRWA sent to news outlets. Please read and take action by attending the scheduled public hearing or submitting comments. Detailed information is included at the end of the release. Note: Attachments are not included.*

The City of Atlanta ("Atlanta") is trying to turn back the clock on water quality in the South River. Atlanta's federal Clean Water Act permit is up for renewal and the City is looking to rollback progress by removing limits on pollution dumped into the South River and Intrenchment Creek. What Atlanta is proposing is called backsliding and is prohibited under federal law.

How much pollution Atlanta can discharge from its combined sewer system into the South River and Intrenchment Creek is determined by a federal Clean Water permit issued by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GA EPD) commonly referred to by its acronym NPDES or National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System. The permit is valid for five years and was last issued to Atlanta in January 2005 and expired in January 2010.

The City has been violating its NPDES permit almost since it was issued. These violations are documented in correspondence between Atlanta and GA EPD. (See attached correspondence from Marzieh Shahbazaz, GA EPD to Jo Ann Macrina, City of Atlanta, dated Nov. 28, 2011). The GA EPD has administratively extended Atlanta's NPDES permit since it expired. With this action, the GA EPD authorized continued pollution of the South River and Intrenchment Creek.

The punishment for violations is fines which are levied at the discretion of GA EPD. Even when imposed, paying the fine is cheaper than fixing the problem. (See attached City of Atlanta legislation approving payment). If this sounds familiar, it should, because this is exactly the scenario that led to the federal consent action against Atlanta for its combined sewer overflow (CSO) system in 1997.

Now, the City of Atlanta is trying to turn back the clock. Atlanta's federal Clean Water Act permit is up for renewal and Atlanta is looking to rollback progress by removing limits on pollution dumped into the South River and Intrenchment Creek. What Atlanta is proposing is called backsliding and is prohibited under the U.S. Clean Water Act.

"If Atlanta succeeds communities in DeKalb, Rockdale, Newton, Henry, Jasper, and Butts Counties will suffer. We all live downstream; what harms one, harms all" is the view of Jackie Echols, president of South River Watershed Alliance the watchdog group for the South River. Below is a summary that will help to quickly understand the gravity of this situation:

1) Atlanta's 2005, federal Clean Water Act permit to operate its combined sewer system places limits on two types of pollution currently being discharged into the South River.

2) The first type is from human and animal poop that reduce oxygen aquatic life need to breathe and is called Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD).



Degraded Intrenchment Creek at the Custer Avenue Combined Sewer Overflow Facility. Note trash from wastewater in trees.
Photo by Judith Vanderver 2015

3) The second type is caused by tiny particles of dirt, called silt, and other minute particles suspended in the water column. These particles also reduce oxygen and interfere with the use of sunlight needed to create food and the ability of aquatic life to find food. This pollution is called Total Suspended Solids or TSS.

4) Limits for these two pollutants have already been removed from the new draft permit confirming that the GA EPD is poised to allow Atlanta to rollback protections for the South River.

5) Removing pollution limits will adversely affect the South River and communities downstream of Atlanta that are just beginning to enjoy and experience the recreational and health value of their river.

6) The anti-backsliding provision of the federal Clean Water Act is clear; backsliding is prohibited except under very limited conditions that Atlanta does not meet. The law states that the proposed permit must be at least as stringent as the past permit.

The operative two words in National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) is "discharge elimination" states Echols. Atlanta and GA EPD should be actively pursuing ways to eliminate discharges, not trying to turn back the clock." "As anyone who knows me will tell you, Echols continues, "I am passionate about the benefits of this permit, why, first because it is the law and second, it provides the most reliable protection surface waters have under the federal Clean Water Act."

SRWA is working with environmental attorneys, GreenLaw, to develop comments in response to Atlanta's draft permit.

GA EPD is holding a public hearing on Atlanta's proposed permit Thursday, February 5, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. at the EPD Tradeport Training Room located at 4244 International Parkway, Atlanta, GA 30354. Written comments from the public are due to GA EPD, 2 MLK, Jr. Drive, Suite 1152E, Atlanta, GA 30334 or via email at

EPDcomments@dnr.state.ga.us by Friday, February 13, 2015. Be sure to include the words "NPDES Permit Reissuance - City of Atlanta Combined Sewer System". These are the only opportunities for public involvement in the permitting process.

Sounding the Alarm - We Need Your Help

It is time to sound the alarm! The City of Atlanta is looking to turn back the clock on the South River. If approved by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GA EPD), the 2014 draft permit that Atlanta has proposed will allow more pollution to be dumped into the South River from its combined sewer system. The South River is still struggling to recover from decades of abuse much of it from Atlanta's combined sewer overflows and their proposal will seriously undermine the progress that the river has made.

We cannot allow this to happen.

South River Watershed Alliance (SRWA) has been the voice of the South River since 2000 when we made certain that the South River was not overlooked when limits on pollution were set during the Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper consent decree negotiations. These are the same limits that are now at risk.

SRWA and GreenLaw are working together to ensure that Atlanta's backsliding proposal does not succeed. We need your help to send a strong message that going backwards is not an option. We need your help to stop Atlanta's renewed assault on our river.

Financial resources are urgently needed to fight for the South River. Please help us reach our \$10,000 goal with a gift of \$25, \$50, \$100, or whatever you can afford by donating online at www.southriverga.org or mailing your check to SRWA, P.O. Box 1341, Decatur, GA 30031.

We need your help. Please give!

Rivercane Project in Full Swing

The South River Rivercane Restoration Project is in full swing. Thus far the project has attracted individuals and organizations from throughout metro Atlanta that have contributed almost 200 volunteer hours to removing invasive Chinese privet from along the South River. There are still multiple opportunities to volunteer from now until May. See Upcoming Events below for specific dates.



Volunteers from the evening MBA program at GA Tech

Events

Rivercane Reintroduction Project, Service and Learn at Panola Mountain State Park, Saturday, February 21, 9:00 - 1:00 p.m. Volunteer to help restore rivercane habitat by removing invasive privet and learn why rivercane is critical to the recovery of the South River. [Sign up](#) or email southernriverwatershedalliance@gmail.com.

2015 Rivercane Reintroduction Project, Service and Learn dates: March 7, 14, and 28; April 11 and 25; May 9. [Sign up](#).

South River Youth Stewardship Summer Weekend - One weekend in **June, and July**. More information to come.

South River Canoe/Kayak Paddle - One weekend in **May, June, August and September**. More information to come.

Georgia River Network/SRWA South River Hidden Gems Paddle - **August 22, Lorraine Trailhead to Oglesby Bridge Road (Rockdale County)**.
