New action could close Clean Water Act loophole

Clean Water Act would protect our waters

This past summer, while we faced beach closings and rivers too contaminated for swimming, polluters and their allies in Congress fought hard to dismantle the law that has cleaned and protected our rivers, lakes and streams for 39 years: The Clean Water Act.

Rivers too polluted for swimming

The Clean Water Act has been extremely successful in limiting pollution across the country. But loopholes allow polluters to pave over wetlands and dump waste into streams that feed rivers and lakes, and provide drinking water for millions.

And now, Congress has attempted to revoke the Environmental Protection Agency’s ability to step in when states aren’t protecting their own waters.

For the past several years, Environment Georgia has been working with our national federation, Environment America, to close these loopholes and restore the Clean Water Act’s ability to protect all of our waters. This year, the EPA acted. In April, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson announced a plan to close the loopholes that allow polluters to harm the small waters that feed our lakes and rivers. Further, the agency is gearing up to cut sewage pollution by setting national standards.

“Legal warfare”

Polluting industries have already sprung into action. Mining companies, developers and corporate agribusiness have all urged their friends in Congress to stop the EPA from closing the clean water loophole—ExxonMobil even threatened “legal warfare.”

Over the summer, polluters’ allies in both parties in Congress launched an unprecedented attack on the Clean Water Act. By mid-July, the House of Representatives had passed three separate measures attacking the EPA’s authority to protect our water.

We saw this coming, and had already begun building a campaign to defend the EPA’s clean water initiatives. Environment Georgia activists from all over Georgia sent 2,000 petitions urging the EPA to stand for a strong Clean Water Act.

Federal Clean Water Advocate Piper Crowell releases a report on threats facing our waters.

Go online to take action for our waters. www.EnvironmentGeorgia.org/action
Recent action

**EPA moves to cut smog and toxic air pollution**

This year the Environmental Protection Agency took major steps to cut toxic air pollution from power plants, despite intense opposition from industrial polluters and their allies in Congress.

In March, the EPA proposed the first-ever nationwide limits on mercury pollution from power plants. The new rule would cut mercury emissions by 91 percent—a huge victory, given mercury’s effects on how kids think, learn and behave. In July, the EPA finalized a rule to protect communities from dangerous smog pollution, which could prevent as many as 34,000 premature deaths annually by 2014.

One of three day-long public hearings was hosted by the EPA in Atlanta last May. Our activists spoke out eloquently for strong protections and our staff planned and hosted a mercury hair testing event with the Sierra Club at a nearby hair salon. Polluters and their allies in the Senate fought back with proposals to block the EPA. Our staff and activists helped defeat the measures.

**Work to halt the “reservoir rush”**

This summer the federal appeals court in Atlanta overturned a 2009 decision that prevented state agencies from drawing water from Lake Lanier. Within two months, Alabama and Florida had appealed the Atlanta court’s decision. The original ruling helped spur a “reservoir rush,” in which dozens of reservoir proposals surfaced, threatening to permanently flood wetlands, scar landscapes and destroy endangered species habitat in the process.

Now, as a new state taskforce is drafting criteria for how to spend millions in “water supply money,” Environment Georgia is continuing its advocacy for water efficiency, not new construction. Through testimony and individual meetings with members of this taskforce, we’ve made the case for smarter planning, including more responsible use of Lake Lanier.

“Water efficiency is cheaper and does much less damage to the environment,” said Jennette Gayer, advocate with Environment Georgia. “Strategies like efficiency and conservation deserve state investment.”

Environment Georgia supporters attended a three-day hearing on new rules on coal plants.
In July, an ExxonMobil pipeline spilled more than 42,000 gallons of oil into the pristine Yellowstone River. Now, according to one nearby resident, “You go down to where the oil is, and you don’t hear anything anymore. No birds, no toads, no crickets, nothing.”

The spill once again underscores our need to reduce reliance on oil. Thankfully, there are some encouraging developments on the horizon in our campaign to get Georgia—and the rest of the country—off of oil.

**Cleaner cars**

Georgia, like most states, relies primarily on cars and trucks for transportation. In fact, according to a report released by the Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center, “Getting Off Oil,” our state uses 170 million gallons of oil every year for transportation. Putting cleaner cars on our roads could be a crucial step in easing our oil addiction. This July, President Obama did exactly that.

Environment Georgia’s federal global warming advocate Nathan Willcox was with the president when he announced the outline of proposed clean car standards that will raise gas mileage to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2030. This move will cut our nation’s gas use by 23 billion gallons every year for transportation. Putting cleaner cars on our roads could be a crucial step in easing our oil addiction. This July, President Obama did exactly that.

**Transit advances for Atlanta**

Further, Georgia can reduce its dependence on oil by simply expanding existing public transportation systems. By doubling Georgians’ transit trips, we could reduce oil consumption by 55 million gallons per year—enough oil to drive your car around the globe 1500 times.

This summer, officials around the state worked to compile lists of transportation projects to be paid for with a small future sales tax. The lists provide a real opportunity to put serious money toward expanding transit systems around the state—or they could provide even more capital for roads and sprawl.

In the greater Atlanta area, there will likely be a little more than $6 billion dollars available for transportation projects. In her testimony to the committee, Environment Georgia’s Jennette Gayer urged members to give more funding to public transportation rather than roads, explaining: “Investing in transit will give Atlantans a viable way to reduce the money they spend on transportation and is the largest step our region can take to reduce our dependence on oil.”

Ultimately, the previously mentioned committee presented a draft list of transportation projects that included about $3.4 billion for transit around Atlanta. Environment Georgia will continue to strengthen the options before a final list is decided on in October 2011.

**Plug into clean energy**

Efficiency is the cheapest and cleanest way to cut our fossil fuel use and pollution. It seems intuitive enough: Use less energy, save fuel, and save money.

But with the numerous federal, state and local organizations and agencies ready to help you retrofit your home or business, offering rebates, discounts, financing and other kinds of incentives, it can be tough to figure out where to start.

Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center designed our “Plug Into Clean Energy” guide to help you cut through the clutter and pick what works for you, so you can get on the path toward a more efficient home or business, one step at a time.

Here are five low- to no-cost things you can do right now to cut your energy use:

1. **Replace incandescent light bulbs with CFLs to cut your lighting costs by up to 75 percent.**
2. **Wash your laundry using cold water only.**
3. **Plug appliances into power strips, and turn them off when not in use.**
4. **Put aluminum foil behind radiators to reflect heat back into the room.**
5. **Scrape—rather than rinse—dishes, and only run the dishwasher when you have a full load.**

For the full list, visit [www.EnvironmentGeorgia.org/center/plug-into-clean-energy](http://www.EnvironmentGeorgia.org/center/plug-into-clean-energy)
Georgia could lose 30 percent of its forests

According to a new U.S. Forest Service report, the southern states are projected to lose 23 million acres of forest—the approximate size of South Carolina—over the next 50 years. In particular, forests in the Piedmont, which includes Georgia and the Carolinas, could shrink by as much as 30 percent in coming years. These alarming findings emphasized the importance of Environment Georgia’s work to push for federal conservation funds, which could go to work purchasing and preserving forests along some our most special trails, including the Appalachian and Benton MacKaye trails.

This past summer, Environment Georgia’s staff spoke with nearly 20,000 Georgians about our campaign and gathered over 3,000 postcards urging full funding of the critical Land and Water Conservation Fund before delivering them to Sen. Johnny Isakson. We followed up this delivery with a coalition letter that we asked non-profits and businesses that rely on outdoor recreation to sign. We were able to deliver this letter with signers from groups like The Nature Conservancy in Georgia, Patagonia, and Georgia’s chapter of Trout Unlimited.