

## WATER COALITION'S 'DIRTY DOZEN' EXPOSES WORST OFFENSES TO GEORGIA'S WATERWAYS

**C**elebrating 10 years of advocating for clean water, the **Georgia Water Coalition** last November named its Dirty Dozen for 2011, exposing the worst offenses to Georgia's water. Two of the 12 offenses are located in the Chattahoochee watershed: the state's failure to monitor river flow at Atlanta, and a proposed new reservoir on a tributary to Lake Lanier.



The state's leading water protection group, the Coalition is a consortium of more than 180 conservation and environmental organizations, hunting and fishing groups, businesses and faith-based organizations representing more than 300,000 Georgians. Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper is a founding member of the Coalition.

"This is more than a list," said Jerry McCollum, president of the **Georgia Wildlife Federation**. "This is a call to action for Georgia's citizens and its leaders. The sites populating this list are only poster children for the larger problem of a system that is failing to protect our water, our fish and wildlife, and our communities."

### **Dirty politics on the Chattahoochee**

In the 1970s, the **Georgia Environmental Protection Division** (EPD) established a minimum flow standard of 750 cubic feet per second (cfs) in the Chattahoochee at Peachtree Creek to dilute discharges from sewage treatment plants in metro Atlanta. EPD and metro water utilities led by the **Atlanta Regional Commission** have refused to support real-time monitoring at this critical location. This makes compliance impossible to verify, thereby threatening the river's health downstream.

Moreover, EPD has not conducted a comprehensive study to confirm that the flow standard established 30-plus years ago is still

adequate to protect Georgia's most heavily used river from growing demands. To ensure protection of the Chattahoochee, EPD must insist that agencies share important data, fund real-time water monitoring stations and conduct a study to confirm, or recommend revision to, the minimum flow requirements to protect all downstream users.

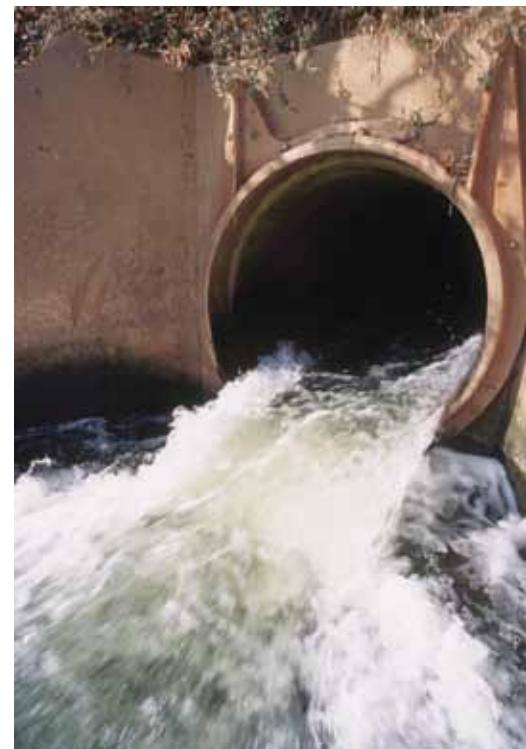
With a price of more than \$350 million, the proposed Glades Reservoir on Flat Creek in Hall County illustrates what is wrong with Georgia's strategy to "drought proof" metro Atlanta. Promoted by powerful insiders, Glades involves building a dam to create an amenity lake for a residential development masquerading as a water supply reservoir. It would siphon massive quantities of water from the Chattahoochee River immediately upstream of Lake Lanier.

Other members of the Dirty Dozen include a textile manufacturing plant on the Ogeechee River blamed for a massive fish kill; Rayonier's pulp mill on the Altamaha River; the proposed Savannah River Harbor deepening project; a proposed coal-fired power plant on the Oconee River; depletion of flows on the Flint River; destruction of coastal marshes; and fish kills in middle Georgia linked to kaolin processing.

### **Funding cuts, political cronyism**

The Coalition blames continuing funding cuts to EPD and a lack of political will to aggressively enforce state and federal environmental laws and implement state policy that better protects and manages Georgia's water. Since 2008, EPD has seen its funding slashed by 44 percent, on the heels of steady cuts of around 40 percent since the 1980s, but the Coalition asserts that political cronyism also plays a part in the agency's failure to enforce laws.

At least half of the 18 citizens serving on the governor-appointed **Department of Natural Resources Board**, which oversees EPD, have ties to business interests that are directly or indirectly regulated by EPD. By contrast, there are no full-time environmental advocates, scientists or biologists serving on the board.



"Too often in Georgia, the fox is watching the hen house," said UCR's Sally Bethea, a former member of the DNR Board who was removed during a purge in 2007 that also eliminated other conservationists. "Some of the problems on this list have been happening for decades, and the agency that is supposed to fix the problems can't, or won't. The failures go deeper than lack of funding."

The Coalition's report details the history of each site and provides solutions to correct these ongoing pollution problems and eliminate the listed threats. Visit <http://www.garivers.org/gawater/dirtydozen.htm>.

### Inside This Issue:

<b>UCR prevents clear-cutting</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Volunteer finds his groove</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Better Building Challenge</b>	<b>Page 5</b>
<b>Safeguarding West Point Lake</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>2011 By the Numbers</b>	<b>Page 8</b>

**STAFF**

Sally Bethel  
*Executive Director and Riverkeeper*

Tammy Bates  
*Events and Outreach Director*

Juliet Cohen  
*General Counsel*

Bill Crawford  
*Business Manager*

Laura Hartt  
*Water Policy Director*

Becca Klein  
*Development Director*

Mary Manson  
*Receptionist*

Bonny Putney  
*Headwaters Outreach Manager*

David Lee Simmons  
*Communications Director*

Jill Sistino  
*Regional Outreach Manager*

Jason Ulseth  
*Technical Programs Director*

Christina York  
*Office Manager*

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Denise Donahue

Gary Gaines

Billy Hall

Victor Haydel

Hugo Hernandez

Christine Hung

Richard Jacobson

Ben Jordan

Dave Kirkpatrick

Jim McCaffrey

Steve O'Day

Jamie Pryor

David Shaffer

Charles Smith

Catherine Woodling

J. Rutherford Seydel II, Chair

Our mission is to advocate and secure the protection and stewardship of the Chattahoochee River, its tributaries and watershed.

**ATLANTA OFFICE**  
3 Puritan Mill  
916 Joseph Lowry Blvd.  
Atlanta, GA 30318  
404-352-9828

**GAINESVILLE OFFICE**  
615 F Oak Street  
Suite 1000  
Gainesville, GA 30501  
770-531-1064

**LAGRANGE OFFICE**  
35 Lafayette Square  
LaGrange GA 30240

[www.chattahoochee.org](http://www.chattahoochee.org)  
[www.getthedirtout.org](http://www.getthedirtout.org)

# Reflections

As I write this column, it's late November and Lake Lanier is almost 13 feet down from its "normal pool"; West Point Lake, downstream of Atlanta, is almost 11 feet down. Water inflows to Lanier are at an all-time low, while water withdrawals from the lake and the river continue unabated.

The **Corps of Engineers**, which manages the lakes, predicts that they will continue to drop, meaning that Lanier could be just a few feet from its all-time low of 20 feet below normal pool when you receive this newsletter in January. Of course, it could start raining again, but are we willing to bet on the weather temporarily bailing us out and continue business as usual?

The most startling fact about our situation is that few in state government are talking about the extreme drought that Georgia has been facing for more than half a year.

## *A deafening silence from state leaders*

Last summer, **Gov. Nathan Deal** asked for federal disaster relief for parched farmers, but other than this plea for taxpayers in other states to provide funds to Georgia farmers, there has been a deafening silence from state leaders regarding our ongoing water crisis.

There have been no calls for citizens and businesses to cut back on water use and no incentives provided to encourage conservation and efficiency, except from a few affected local governments.



Without notice, the governor fired long-time state climatologist and UGA professor **David Stooksbury**, and appointed a state employee in his place. The respected Stooksbury was frequently quoted in the media, providing important drought information. Little has been heard from the new climatologist.

One might speculate that there's an aversion to the "d-word" in state government these days, a 180-degree turn from four years ago when then-Gov. Sonny Perdue claimed that metro Atlanta was just 80 days from running out of water, and publicly prayed for rain.

In fact, if you fell asleep four years ago and just woke up, you might assume that little had changed in terms of the weather, and that the region was still mired in the same drought.

The difference now is that our elected officials are not talking about the drought, its looming impact to our economic prosperity and the health of our rivers, perhaps hoping that, by ignoring this elephant in the room, it will just shuffle away.

A few local governments are taking steps to protect their citizens by implementing water-use restrictions, focusing on outdoor watering that takes a huge toll on our lakes and rivers in late summer and early fall. Unfortunately, thanks to the much-touted Water Stewardship Act passed in 2010, municipalities must now fill out paperwork and secure state approval before they can take these water-wise actions.

It's time for state leaders to learn that the first step to recovery is acknowledging the problem.

*Sally Bethel*  
*Executive Director and Riverkeeper*

## Watershed Moment

I've paddled the Chattahoochee River from **West Point Dam to Lake Harding** hundreds of times over the past 14 years; it's the place I go to relax and spend time with friends. One day, we're going to make this section an official blue trail, so that it's more accessible to folks, which is one of the reasons I helped start the Middle Chattahoochee River Stewards. Then, more people can learn about the old mill dams on the river (photo) and their history, see the abundant wildlife including eagles, and visit my favorite place, the Crow Hop Islands.

— **Jimmy Stewart**, Valley, Ala.



# On Patrol

For further details on UCR's investigations and enforcement actions, go to [www.chattahoochee.org/on-patrol](http://www.chattahoochee.org/on-patrol).

## AIRPORT WITHDRAWS PLAN TO CLEAR-CUT RIVER, STREAM BUFFERS

Officials with Fulton County's 50-year-old **Charlie Brown Airport**, located near the Chattahoochee River, determined that 150 acres of forested land surrounding the runways present a hazard to air navigation safety, requiring clearance of all woody vegetation.

Seventeen of the 150 acres are vegetated buffers along the river, a major creek, and smaller tributaries — areas critical to filter stormwater runoff, cool waterways with shade, and provide food and habitat for wildlife.

In 2011, the county asked the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) for a variance to remove all the trees and woody vegetation in the 25-foot, state-protected buffer — more than three linear miles on both sides of the waterways and the largest single project impact to buffers we have ever reviewed.

### UCR legal challenge leads to victory

UCR attempted to work with the Fulton County Airport and the state agency to secure compliance with buffer protection laws, while ensuring air safety; however, EPD approved the variance request with no mitigation, failing to comply with its own regulations. We had no choice but to appeal this decision.

After initial settlement discussions, EPD decided to withdraw the variance it had issued. The county will revise its clearing plan to minimize impacts in the buffers in conformity with Federal Aviation Administration regulations, as well as include appropriate mitigation to offset any buffer impacts. We have been assured that UCR will be involved in any future attempt by the airport to seek a buffer variance.

For now, the trees that line the banks of the Chattahoochee and Sandy Creek near Brown Airport will continue to help keep these important waterways clean.



Fulton County Airport proposed to remove all trees and woody vegetation in the buffer along the river (see photo), a major tributary, and a dozen smaller tributaries.

## Monitoring reveals violations on Lake Lanier

During the 2011 "growing season" (April-October), UCR collected monthly water samples at 10 locations on Lake Lanier and tested them for chlorophyll *a* as part of our **Lake Lanier Clean Water Campaign**. Chlorophyll *a* levels are used to determine the amount of algal growth in the lake and are an important indicator of the lake's health. The samples, which were analyzed by a University of Georgia water lab, showed violations of the state water quality standard at three locations, indicating that excessive nutrients are still entering the lake and confirming the need for an expedited cleanup plan. We are working with the **Upper Chattahoochee Basin Group** to ensure that proper action is taken to restore the lake's water quality.

## Metro Water Planning District

### Forsyth judge reverses clean water decision

In September, a Forsyth County judge reversed an earlier decision in UCR's appeal of a wastewater discharge permit issued by the state EPD to the county for its new **Fowler/Shakerag facility**. Chief Judge Jeffrey Bagley held that ALJ Kristin Miller incorrectly applied an "enhanced anti-degradation review" to find that the permit would degrade water quality in the Chattahoochee National Recreation Area and that EPD must reissue the permit with more stringent pollution limits. UCR sought appellate review which was granted by the Georgia Court of Appeals; a decision is expected in 2012. At the same time, EPD's attempt to rewrite the state's anti-degradation rule in light of the Shakerag case has met a roadblock. The U.S. EPA submitted extensive comments and questions on the state's proposed new rule and EPD will have to respond before the new rule can be approved.

### Poultry industry aims to weaken negotiated permit

The "general permit" that regulates polluted stormwater runoff from industrial facilities must be renewed every five years through a negotiated stakeholder process. As the representative of the environmental community, UCR was successful in securing improvements to the permit in 2011 to remove loopholes allowing habitual violators to continue to pollute nearby waterways. Nearly three months after the comment period closed and just prior to the issuance of the final permit, the **Georgia Poultry Federation** (GPF) reversed its position, seeking to weaken the more protective changes. This 11th hour intervention represents a direct attack on clean water laws and breaches any trust developed during the negotiations. GPF's complaints led EPD to make changes to the general permit which UCR is evaluating, while considering next steps.

## West Point Lake

### High bacteria levels found in Proctor Creek

UCR's **Neighborhood Water Watch Program** is a partnership with local neighborhood groups, schools and local citizens to monitor the health of urban streams. One of our partner groups, **West Atlanta Watershed Alliance**, took multiple samples in 2011 that revealed high levels of E. coli bacteria in Proctor Creek as it flows under Joseph E. Boone Bridge in southwest Atlanta. Additional monitoring conducted by UCR, Atlanta Regional Commission and the city of Atlanta confirmed the presence of significant bacteria levels at the recently disconnected Greensferry combined sewer overflow facility. The city is inspecting the underground pipes that enter this system with closed caption video cameras to identify the source, likely to be cracked sanitary sewer lines. We will continue to monitor the situation.

# River Stewardship

## UCR CLEANS UP WITH MORE EVENTS, NEW PARTNERSHIPS

**U**CR's commitment to cleaning up the Chattahoochee grew even stronger over the past year with the addition of a massive, coordinated single-day cleanup and partnerships that have broadened our reach.

The cleanup numbers for 2011 only tell a part of the story, but they are telling: 23.5 tons of trash picked up over 17 cleanups thanks to the efforts of 850 volunteers, one of whom is profiled below.

There's even more to tell behind the numbers. Thanks to a partnership with the **Upper Chattahoochee Chapter of Trout Unlimited** and the **National Park Service**, we staged the inaugural Sweep the Hooch last April. The event featured 360 volunteers working 18 sites in the Chattahoochee River National Recreational Area to remove 2.76 tons of trash. Working with **Remix Recycling**, we were able, for the first time, to recycle 1,500 pounds of the Sweep trash.

Overall, out of the 23.5 tons of trash and debris we removed from the Chattahoochee watershed, 1.7 tons were recycled!

"Our new partnership with Remix Recycling has allowed us to incorporate this important component of our cleanups," says UCR Events and Outreach Director Tammy Bates. "It takes quite a bit more time to get the trash ready for Remix, but it is time well spent. They in turn sort it, then package it and then it goes to its next life."

### Working hand in hand

Most of our cleanups throughout the year feature partnerships with one or more area companies, including **Turner Broadcasting**, **Cox**



*UCR picked up 23.5 tons of trash over 17 cleanups with 850 volunteers.*

**Conserves**, **Whole Foods Market**, **AutoBell Car Wash**, **Atlanta Silverbacks**, **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**, **Boston Consulting**, **LaGrange College**, **West Atlanta Watershed Alliance**, **English Avenue Association**, **city of Gainesville**, and of course our hardy volunteers. Big thanks to **Republic Services** which provides a 30-yard roll-off dumpster for many of our cleanups.

We'll return with the second annual Sweep the Hooch on April 14.

Want to become involved? *Register as a volunteer at [www.chattahoochee.org/cleanups.php](http://www.chattahoochee.org/cleanups.php) and help us clean our rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands. Registered volunteers will receive email alerts on upcoming cleanup dates, as well as other volunteer opportunities with UCR.*

## VOLUNTEERING RECONNECTS NEW MEMBER WITH THE HOOCH

**A**dam Horrisberger made a big splash in just a few months of volunteering with UCR. Already familiar with our work over the years, the 43-year-old hadn't gotten his feet wet until this past summer, but he's made every visit count.

Horrisberger was looking for a way to help out when he contacted UCR's Tammy Bates, who immediately suggested getting involved in our river cleanups. Three cleanups and about 1,800 pounds of trash later, and Horrisberger is hooked; he's the guy you can see pulling out tires and other debris in a feature that ran on "This is Atlanta" on the local PBS affiliate PBA 30 this past fall.

"It's rewarding to me to give back to the river that I have spent so much time on and enjoy," Horrisberger said in the segment.

An avid canoeer and fisherman, the New Jersey native moved to Atlanta in time for the Summer Olympics in 1996 and became familiar with the river. He even helped out with UCR over the years when he worked for a boating



*UCR volunteer Adam Horrisberger was featured in a recent "This is Atlanta" profile about UCR.*

goods supply store, donating life preservers, boat fenders and dock lines for our river patrol boat.

### 'Something I love'

But everything changed when he participated in his first cleanup.

Though he says he's an outgoing guy, on his first outing, "I was a little nervous. Then came all the cars, and everyone was so warm and friendly," he recalls. After he and another volunteer hit the water, it wasn't long before they came upon a black stump sticking out of the water. They got out and learned on closer inspection that it was a corrugated drainage tube about 20 feet long, filled with dirt.

Afterward, Horrisberger recalls, "When I walked through the door of my home, I was just jazzed! I said, 'I feel so good right now,' because I was out doing what I love doing. But the reward was tenfold, because we've done something, and it's something I love."

"I was riding the wave on that one for days. It feels good so you want to continue doing it, because it's such a great cause."

*Learn more about UCR volunteer opportunities at [www.ucriverkeeper.org/volunteer.php](http://www.ucriverkeeper.org/volunteer.php).*

# WHITE HOUSE TAPS ATLANTA FOR BETTER BUILDING CHALLENGE

The Obama Administration has chosen Atlanta along with Seattle and Los Angeles as one of three pilot cities for the Better Building Challenge (BBC). The BBC was launched in 2011 to support private efforts to improve energy efficiency in commercial buildings. Nationally, the initiative could save \$40 billion dollars annually in energy costs while helping businesses grow and creating more jobs.

This challenge means the city of Atlanta has pledged not only to reduce energy use, but also water use in downtown buildings 20 percent by 2020. To meet the challenge, the **Mayor's Office of Sustainability** has partnered with the **U.S. Department of Energy**, local businesses and nonprofits to upgrade Atlanta's 220-block downtown area — roughly 2 million square feet.



Photo courtesy of Georgia World Congress Center

*The Georgia World Congress Center is one of the commercial buildings included in the Better Building Challenge.*

Government (e.g., City Hall, Civic Center), commercial (e.g., Georgia Dome, Georgia World Congress Center), hospital and university buildings are targeted for upgrades. Thanks to upgrades to its heating and cooling system, Atlanta's showcase BBC project, the **Civic Center**, already is saving 1.8 million gallons of water and \$228,000 in energy costs annually.

In addition to improved energy and water efficiency in commercial buildings, the city has committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 25 percent by 2020; reduce, reuse and recycle 90 percent of the city's residential waste by 2020; provide at least 10 acres of green space per 1,000 residents; protect and restore the tree canopy to 40 percent coverage; and provide local food within 10 minutes of 75 percent of all residents by 2020.

## Making the grade

To help participants meet water savings benchmarks, the city's **Department of Watershed Management** will install devices on water meters to provide data over 15-minute intervals. This data, in conjunction with water audits, will help BBC participants identify cost-effective means of reducing water use.

The city also has committed to reduce system leaks by implementing a multi-family toilet rebate program. This year-old program has changed out 1,037 outdated toilets in multi-family residential and commercial buildings, saving 9.7 million gallons annually. Exhibiting further sustainability leadership, the city has partnered with local recyclers to reduce the number of old toilets going to landfills, recycling 100 percent of those toilets changed out through the multi-family rebate program.

For these and other innovative efforts, UCR honored Atlanta last year as a "best in class" water utility.

*To learn more about how local governments are helping to fill our water gap, visit [www.ucrwaterkeeper.org/filling-the-water-gap-report.php](http://www.ucrwaterkeeper.org/filling-the-water-gap-report.php). For BBC information, visit [www.atlantabbc.com](http://www.atlantabbc.com).*

# UCR MEMBERS CELEBRATED, BOAT CHRISTENED AT ANNUAL EVENT

We ended 2011 on an inspiring note with our annual Member Celebration held Dec. 4 at Roswell River Landing — a perfect riverside venue for boat rides, an exhibition of standup paddle boards, and rain barrel painting for younger guests.

Special guest speaker **Donna Lisenby, Upper Watauga Riverkeeper**, rallied the crowd with an important message about the connection between environmental advocacy and the creation of thousands of jobs needed to upgrade water and sewer systems, comply with stormwater control regulations, and develop innovative devices to use water and energy more efficiently. She also emphasized the critical



*Upper Watauga Riverkeeper and guest speaker Donna Lisenby tied river stewardship with job creation.*

importance of our members to help us get the job done in a challenging environment.

We recognized five special volunteers who have assisted with water quality monitoring, event registration, paddle trips and financial management: **Pegi Amend, Bob Atkinson, Bill Hayn, Richard Jacobson and Mike Meyer**. Dozens of guests took a ride on our new river patrol boat and watched as she was christened with river water poured (appropriately) from a SweetWater Waterkeeper Ale bottle.

Big thanks to **SweetWater Brewery** for providing beverages, **Parsley's Catering** for delicious food, and **Big Daddy DJ Service** for music.

# River Matters

*For information on these and other river-related events, visit [www.chattahoochee.org/calendar](http://www.chattahoochee.org/calendar)*

## January 9

**Georgia General Assembly convenes**  
State Capitol

## March 11

**Wild & Scenic Film Festival**  
Location TBA

## April 14

**2nd Annual Sweep the Hooch**  
Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area  
(multiple locations)

## May 4

**16th Annual River Revival**  
Park Tavern

## June 9

**10th Annual Back to the Chattahoochee River Race & Festival**  
Riverside Landing, Roswell (festival location)

## September 13

**Patron Appreciation Dinner**  
The Foundry

## Fall Intern: Ryan Schultz



Our thanks to fall intern Ryan Schultz, who spent the past semester working with Technical Programs Director Jason Ulseth. Ryan graduated

from Georgia College and State University with an interdisciplinary degree with concentrations in biology and environmental science, Schultz spent the bulk of his time on our Neighborhood Water Watch program, collecting weekly samples from a few local spots for processing and analyzing out of our office lab. "He has many valuable skill sets for environmental work, and has a promising career in environmental protection ahead of him," Ulseth said. Schultz, a native Atlantan, cites the annual Patron Appreciation Dinner among his favorite moments, and hopes to incorporate what he's learned at UCR into his future science work.

"I can definitely see myself continuing to do this kind of work for a career," he said. "I love being in the field and working firsthand to improve our watershed."

# EPD PROPOSES LONG-OVERDUE, PROTECTIVE STANDARD AT WEST POINT LAKE

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) held a public meeting last September to share the results of an updated watershed and lake model for West Point Lake, as well as to discuss proposed revisions to the chlorophyll *a* standard for the lake. Chlorophyll *a* is a pigment found in algae and is used as an indicator of nutrient pollution, which can deplete oxygen in the water and lead to serious water quality problems.

The state's current chlorophyll *a* standard shall not exceed 27 µg/L more than once in a five-year period at the LaGrange water intake. This standard was set in the late 1990s, based on a very limited set of data. At the time, the city of Atlanta and other upstream wastewater facilities were discharging high levels of phosphorus that threatened to turn West Point Lake into a toxic soup.

UCR's lawsuit against the city of Atlanta, which set in motion more than a decade of repairs costing in excess of \$2 billion, helped result in much cleaner water reaching the downstream lake. Still, concern for the long-term health of the lake lingers, and West Point Lake advocates, including the city of LaGrange, requested a more protective standard.



State and local officials test for chlorophyll *a* levels in West Point Lake.

## Harsh reaction from metro Atlanta utilities

In the past year, EPD ran various scenarios in advanced computer models and used data sets spanning more than five years. The models show that the largest contributor to nutrient pollution in the lake is from wastewater discharges upstream, and that a more protective chlorophyll *a* standard can be met with upstream discharges at full permit.

Based on the model results, EPD proposed to set a new, more stringent standard of 20 µg/L at the LaGrange intake and to establish a new station at the lake dam pool of 22 µg/L.

At the fall hearing, and in writing some weeks later, the **15-county Metro Water Planning District** expressed skepticism of the model and dismissed EPD's finding that no changes to wastewater treatment, and therefore no additional cost, would be incurred by the upstream metro water utilities as a result of the more protective water quality standards.

UCR will continue to support LaGrange's right to clean water and participate in the regulatory process to revise the chlorophyll *a* standards to better protect water quality in the river below Atlanta and West Point Lake.

## SOUTHERN RAINBOW MUSSEL FOUND IN RIVER BELOW ATLANTA

For the past decade, **Alan Cressler**, a hydrologic technician with the U.S. Geological Survey in Atlanta, has conducted routine water quality sampling twice a month in the Chattahoochee River near Whitesburg, Ga.

On Nov. 2, 2011, he found something he had never seen before in the river and thought he would never find in the long-blighted river section below Atlanta: a native freshwater mussel species.

Cressler says that he saw the distinctive track of a bivalve in the sediment on the river bottom near Riverside Park in Coweta County, about 42 miles downstream of Atlanta. He thought it was a Corbicula (or Asian) clam, commonly found throughout the Chattahoochee River

system. Instead, it was a Villosa vibex, the southern rainbow mussel – not an endangered species, but still unusual for the area.

### A surprising find

"I was quite surprised to discover it was a native mussel in very good condition," says Cressler. "While the animal could have been placed in the river from another source, I think that it is significant because it is in the river below the city of Atlanta. It's remarkable how nicely the river has recovered. I have visually seen water quality improve at that site."

Over the past decade, the city of Atlanta has spent several billion dollars to clean up sewage overflows that had plagued the Chattahoochee since the 1970s, until Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper sued the city in federal court in 1995 and won. Today, the city has stopped 97 percent of the volume of its chronic sewage spills, and will have achieved a 99 percent reduction by 2014. Other water pollution control efforts also are helping the river to recover.

No other country in the world equals the United States in freshwater mussel variety. In the rivers and lakes where they live, their filtering ability makes them natural water purifiers. Unfortunately, these animals may be the most troubled natural resources in this country. It's estimated that 70 percent of our freshwater mussels are extinct, endangered or in need of special protection. Many of their problems stem from how they live and changes that have occurred to their habitat during the past 200 years. For more information about freshwater mussels, visit [www.fws.gov/news/mussels.html](http://www.fws.gov/news/mussels.html).

Photo courtesy of Alan Cressler



Southern Rainbow Mussel

# THE BIG THIRST BRINGS HOME URGENCY OF GLOBAL WATER CRISIS

The *Big Thirst* author **Charles Fishman** is as interesting and energetic as his new book, which was released last year by Free Press.

On yet another dry fall day in November, Fishman talked about our strange and complex relationship with water at the **Marcus Jewish Community Center's** annual book festival. With compelling examples from around the world, he explained that the era of "easy water" is over.

Did you know that the water that comes out of our faucets is 4 billion years old and might well have been sipped by a Tyrannosaurus Rex; that the United States uses more water than oil each day in one year; that the electricity we use at home requires 250 gallons of water per person each day; or that a single day's meals for a typical American require 450 gallons of water?

Fishman also points out that the economics of water are often irrational. Americans spend almost as much money buying bottled water each year (\$21 billion) as they do maintaining the nation's entire water system (\$29 billion).

These amazing water facts and many more, along with stories of heroic efforts to provide humans with adequate water supplies, are presented by Fishman in a highly readable format. The author also focuses his laser-sharp reporter skills on Atlanta, noting: "Going back fifty years, water planning and water management in the area have consisted mostly of wishful thinking, rain dances and litigation."

## What happens in Vegas?

Comparing Georgia's capital with the desert city of Las Vegas, Fishman



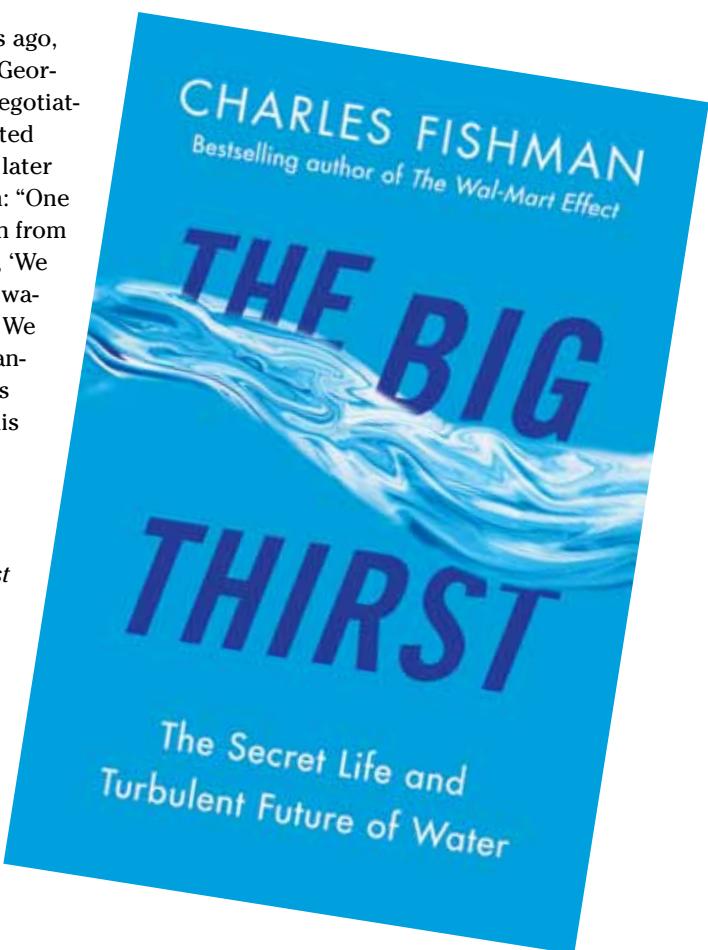
Photos courtesy of Simon & Schuster

*Charles Fishman writes that Atlanta's water planning consists of "wishful thinking, rain dances and litigation."*

observes differences that he says have nothing to do with climate or water, concluding that the real difference is in attitude. Instead of aggressively and creatively reducing water demand as Las Vegas has under the guidance of veteran "water czar" Patricia Mulroy, Georgia's leaders blame others.

Several years ago, members of Georgia's water negotiating team visited Mulroy, who later told Fishman: "One of the women from Georgia said, 'We don't have a water problem. We have an endangered species problem.' This is the state's lead negotiator! I lost it."

*The Big Thirst* is a wake-up call not just for Atlanta, but for everyone who relies on this precious "cosmic juice."



# THEY'RE BACK IN TOWN UNDER THE GOLD DOME!

The Georgia General Assembly has begun its 40-day session for 2012, which is the second and final session of the current legislature. This means bills introduced in 2011 that did not pass last year are still eligible for consideration in 2012, along with any new bills that are introduced. The new legislators elected from districts that were drawn during the special session last summer will not take their seats until the 2013 session.

Bills of particular interest to conservationists, and still pending from 2011, include those dealing with the regulation of the interbasin transfer of water — the piping of water from one river basin to another without return, which results in a consumptive loss of water to the basin of origin. Several measures on this subject were introduced in 2011, but none was allowed to move out of committee in either the House or Senate during the session because of the opposition of the chairs of the Natural Resources Committees in both chambers, some business groups and others.

Those legislators who are conservationists and/or represent downstream communities are expected to continue to push for mandatory, instead of discretionary, regulation of interbasin transfers of

water to ensure that all downstream uses are protected.

The legislature may also attempt to relax environmental protections, possibly on the theory that environmental laws are somehow preventing the creation of jobs. DeKalb County has noted that the work required to fix its overflowing sewage system will create close to 5,000 jobs in the coming years, proving that environmental regulations can actually create jobs!

Finally, the Georgia DOT may again attempt to exempt itself and its contractors from some fines for clean water violations, an effort that UCR helped defeat in 2011.

## Get involved

We urge you to connect with your representatives in the State House and Senate to let them know you care about the protection of Georgia's waterways and to hold them accountable.

*To find out more about your representatives, including their contact information, go online to [www.congress.org](http://www.congress.org).*

*and insert your zip code under "Get Involved." To stay informed during the 2012 session, see [www.chattahoochee.org](http://www.chattahoochee.org).*



# 2011 – BY THE NUMBERS

**I**t was a year filled with challenges, opportunities, victories and service – in other words, another typically exciting and productive year for Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper. Below are snapshots of how we advocate and secure the protection and stewardship of the river.



*Our new West Point Lake office opened in September on the square in LaGrange.*

For a complete of “2011 By the Numbers,” watch the slideshow on our homepage: [www.chattahoochee.org](http://www.chattahoochee.org).

**1** Precedent-setting court victory to keep high quality waters clean in the Chattahoochee National Recreation Area and impose more stringent pollution controls on Forsyth County’s wastewater discharge. Although this judicial decision was reversed, appellate review at the next level has been granted and a decision is expected in 2012.



*We increased our water monitoring sampling by a third.*

**1** Bill defeated that would have exempted Georgia’s Department of Transportation from enforcement in some erosion cases. Now they’ll be held accountable like everyone else.

**7** Water quality monitoring trips on Lake Lanier and 91 nutrient samples analyzed, a 33 percent uptick in samples analyzed, underscoring once again UCR’s focus on science and data.



*We helped Trout Unlimited with an important brown trout study.*

## UPPER CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVERKEEPER®

*Keeping Watch Over Our Waters*

3 Puritan Mill  
916 Joseph Lowery Blvd.  
Atlanta, Georgia 30318  
404 352-9828

Non-Profit  
Organization  
US Postage Paid  
Permit No. 3363  
Atlanta, Georgia

Address Service Requested



 **Printed on paper made with 30% post-consumer waste.**

**Printing Provided by Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta.**

**If you prefer to receive RiverCHAT electronically, contact David Lee Simmons at [dsimmons@ucriverkeeper.org](mailto:dsimmons@ucriverkeeper.org).**



*Ten paddle trips drew 202 paddlers.*

**18** Neighborhood Water Watch programs established and 476 bacteria samples analyzed, nearly doubling the size of last year’s program.

**850** Volunteers participated in stream, lake and river cleanups, an increase of nearly 300 from last year.

*(We now have more than 1,000 volunteers; see more on both cleanups and volunteers on Page 4 of this issue.)*

**5,452**  
UCR members celebrated, including 1,037 new members – **thank you!**



*We welcomed 3,866 students aboard our floating classroom.*