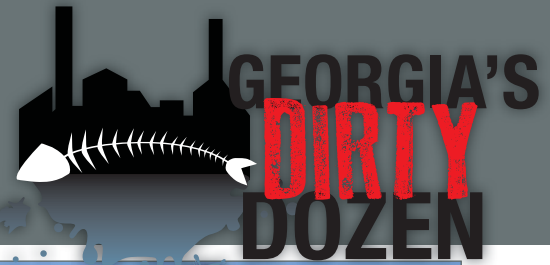


2011's worst offenses against Georgia's Water



#3

Savannah River:

Costly Harbor Dredging Wrecks the Savannah River Estuary

Harbor deepening projects on the Savannah during the past century have destroyed two-thirds of the 12,000 acres of the rare and ecologically important tidal freshwater wetlands contained in the Savannah River National Wildlife Refuge. Now, the Georgia Ports Authority and EPD are supporting a harbor deepening plan that will allow saltwater to push further up the Savannah River, irreversibly degrading river ecosystems. The project is expected to destroy another 20 percent of the remaining refuge wetlands, vastly increase the cost of clean drinking water in Savannah, and place several fish species in further jeopardy. Meanwhile, the \$600 million taxpayer project is not predicted to increase commerce at Savannah's port or create any new jobs.

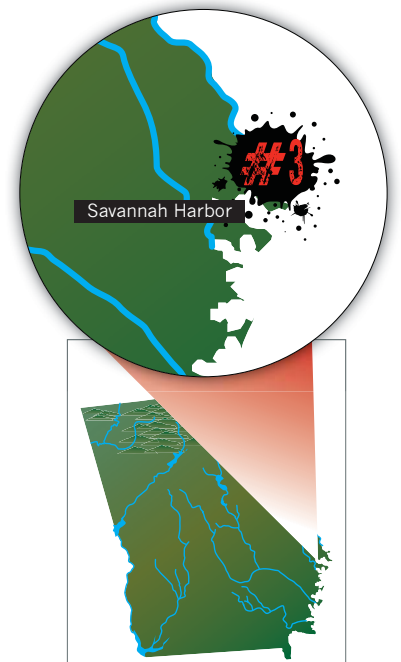
The River:

For the past 250 years, the Savannah River has been crucial to the economy and the ambience of the historic city sharing its name. Though it drains portions of South Carolina and North Carolina, its name is synonymous with Georgia. It winds some 313 miles along the Georgia-South Carolina border before spreading out into a vast network of tidal freshwater marshes and emptying into the Atlantic. The marshes of the Savannah River account for 28 percent of the freshwater marshes along the east coast of the U.S.

The Dirt:

The Georgia Ports Authority, with support from the highest levels of state government, is pursuing a plan to deepen the Savannah harbor six feet, from 42 feet to 48 feet, to accommodate larger ocean-going freighters at a cost of \$600 million—all underwritten with tax dollars. The project will:

- Threaten the health of rare and valuable tidal freshwater wetlands in the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge
- Further endanger the federally protected shortnose sturgeon
- Vastly increase the cost of supplying drinking water to the City of Savannah





- Waste tax dollars by deepening a harbor not well suited to navigating mega-ships while other Southeast ports are.
- Justifications for the project and efforts to mitigate environmental impacts remain unsubstantiated and unproven.

About one-third of the deepening project budget of \$600 million is directed toward environmental mitigation costs, including a dubious proposal by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to inject oxygen into the Savannah River to prevent fish kills that are likely as a result of the harbor deepening. The U.S. Geological Survey reviewed the testing results for this mitigation approach and found them inconclusive, yet the Corps claims those same tests justify the approach. The endangered shortnose sturgeon would be among the victims if this plan fails. Additionally, serious questions still remain about the accuracy of the Corps' computer modeling of hydrology and salinity, which serves as the basis for predicting all impacts and mitigation plans.

The Corps' study of the project's economic benefits does not demonstrate any connection between harbor deepening and new jobs, or even any additional growth in port commerce above the current trend-line. In spite of this, without objective documentation to justify it, proponents of the project assert that deepening is essential for Georgia's economic prosperity. Meanwhile, the Corps has failed to conduct an adequate analysis of alternatives to determine if other southeastern ports could be improved at lesser costs to taxpayers and the environment while producing greater benefits.

Finally, because the project allows saltwater to encroach further upstream, the City of Savannah will be forced to move its drinking water intake on the Savannah and has proposed construction of a drinking water reservoir to compensate for periods of low flow – an unprecedented proposal in the coastal region. The project will cost Savannah taxpayers and water users an estimated \$30 million.

What Must Be Done:

Proponents of the harbor deepening project must set aside provincially-motivated aspirations to expand the Savannah port to ensure that federal tax dollars for port expansion in the Southeast are directed toward sites that make the most sense in order to maximize the benefit of using limited public funds for our economy and our environment.

The Corps must expand its final Environmental Impact Study to include a convincing, credible analysis of alternative port expansion projects throughout the Southeast. In 1998, when the Southern Environmental Law Center filed an action objecting to deepening the Savannah harbor due to a lack of multi-port analysis, the court found the issue substantive but not 'ripe' until the final EIS is filed by the Corps.

Comprehensive environmental assessment of all mitigation steps, including energy costs, is also essential.

The Corps is expected to release its final Environmental Impact Statement within the next six months.



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