

# 2011's worst offenses against Georgia's Water



## #4 Chattahoochee River: Critical Minimum Flow Neglected at Atlanta

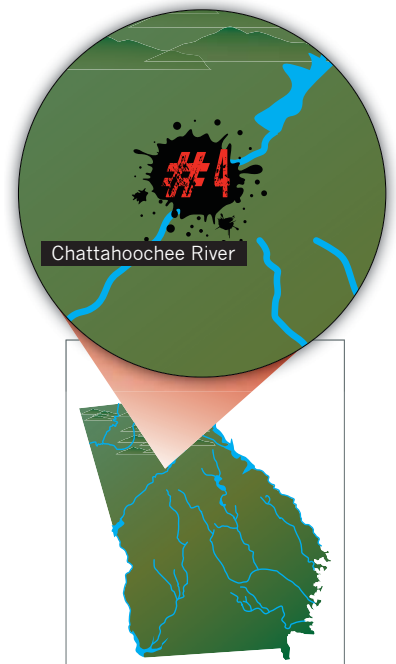
In the 1970s, EPD established a minimum flow standard of 750 cubic feet per second (cfs) in the Chattahoochee at Peachtree Creek to dilute discharges from sewage treatment plants in metro Atlanta and protect the health of the river. EPD has never provided real-time monitoring at this critical location, however, making compliance impossible to verify. In addition, EPD has not conducted a comprehensive, scientific study to confirm that the 750 cfs flow standard established more than 30 years ago is still adequate to protect Georgia's most heavily-used river, particularly in light of growing demands placed on the waterway.

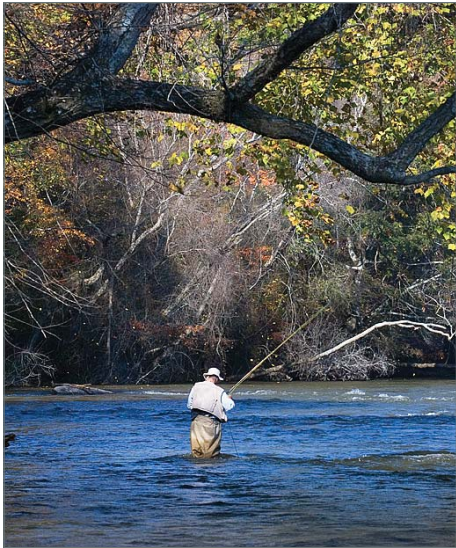
### The River:

The Chattahoochee River drains an area of 8,770 square miles and is the most heavily-used water resource in Georgia. The river arises as a cold-water mountain stream in the Blue Ridge Province at altitudes above 3,000 feet and flows 430 miles southwesterly through Atlanta and four major federal reservoirs to its confluence with the Flint River at the Florida border. The Chattahoochee and Flint form the Apalachicola River, which flows through Florida into the Gulf of Mexico at Apalachicola Bay. Peachtree Creek is a major tributary to the Chattahoochee, which drains Atlanta's urban core and flows into the Chattahoochee just upstream of several major wastewater discharges.

### The Dirt:

Since the 1970s, the state of Georgia has relied on a 750 cfs flow standard in the Chattahoochee above the confluence with Peachtree Creek to protect downstream water quality in the river and West Point Lake. EPD determined this flow was necessary to help dilute treated wastewater and other discharges from metro Atlanta. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) which manages Buford Dam 48-miles upstream from Atlanta is expected to operate the dam to meet this critical flow. In addition, EPD has issued water withdrawal and wastewater discharge permits based on the assumption that this flow standard is met at all times.





In 2008, in response to the drought, EPD secured the approval of the Corps to temporarily reduce the flow standard. On several occasions, water quality problems downstream were noted; however, this data was not received in real-time, so that upstream water management decisions could be made in a timely fashion. Moreover, all water quality parameters are not monitored by the state to ensure a healthy river system. As the current extreme drought worsens, we anticipate another request from the state to reduce the 750 cfs flow standard. Without real-time monitoring at Peachtree Creek and downstream, the Corps may not accurately meet reduced targets, nor can EPD verify that all water quality standards are met.

#### **What Must Be Done:**

EPD must work with the Corps, U.S. EPA, Atlanta Regional Commission and local water utilities to determine an effective means of ensuring the 750 cfs flow standard is met. EPD also must work with these entities to ensure that the 750 cfs standard is protective of all designated uses in the Chattahoochee River. The GWC recommends the following:

- EPD should require all water utilities to provide their withdrawal data to the Corps on a real-time basis so that the Corps can better operate Buford Dam to meet the 750 cfs standard at all times.
- EPD should secure adequate funding for real-time monitoring stations downstream of Atlanta (Capps Ferry) to ensure that water quality needs are met. This monitoring data should be readily accessible to the public and updated daily.
- EPD should work with the Corps, EPA, and the city of Atlanta in the planning and design of the weirs near the city's water intake to install a flow monitoring station in the river to ensure the 750 cfs standard is monitored and that water quality standards are met downstream.
- EPD should conduct an instream flow assessment to determine whether the 750 cfs target is protective of all designated uses. Until that study is complete, EPD should not issue any more water withdrawal or discharge permits.



### **For more Information Contact:**

Sally Bethea, Executive Director & Riverkeeper, Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, 404-352-9828,  
sbethea@ucriverkeeper.org

3 Puritan Mill 916 Joseph E. Lowery Blvd. Atlanta, GA 30318, [www.chattahoochee.org](http://www.chattahoochee.org)