

2011's worst offenses against Georgia's Water



#5 Shoal Creek and Glades Reservoirs: Unnecessary Reservoirs Threaten Downstream Communities, Endangered Species and Public Coffers

With a combined construction price of nearly \$1 billion, the Glades Reservoir on Flat Creek in Hall County and the Shoal Creek Reservoir in neighboring Dawson County illustrate what is wrong with Georgia's strategy to "drought proof" metro Atlanta. Glades Reservoir involves building a dam to create an amenity lake for a residential development masquerading as a water supply reservoir. It will siphon massive quantities of water from the Chattahoochee River immediately upstream of Lake Lanier. The Shoal Creek project would destroy the last stronghold of federally protected fish species found nowhere else in the world and would deplete the Etowah River through a massive water transfer to Metro Atlanta, depriving Lake Allatoona and downstream communities of critical water flows.

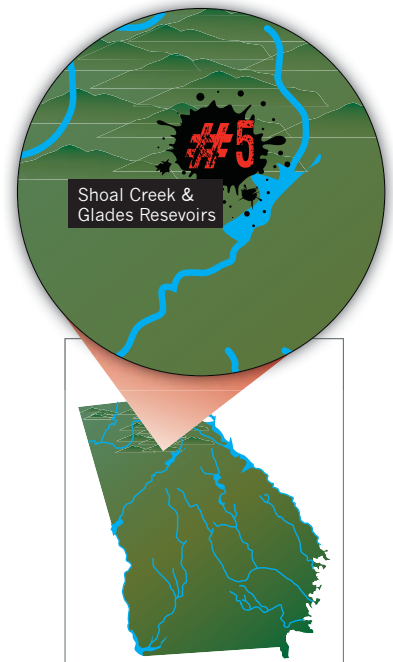
The Water Bodies:

The 160-mile-long Etowah and Lake Allatoona supply water to about 10 percent of Metro Atlanta's population, including communities in Canton, Cartersville, Marietta, Dallas, Douglasville and Rome. The Etowah is also one of the most biologically diverse rivers of its size in the country--home to 76 native fish species, including the Etowah and Cherokee darters which are found no where else in the world.

The Chattahoochee River and Lake Lanier supply water to about 75 percent of Metro Atlanta's five million residents. For two decades, the Chattahoochee has been at the heart of a bitter water allocation dispute between Georgia, Alabama and Florida.

The Dirt:

Building new water supply reservoirs is the most expensive means to address Georgia's water needs. The price tag for Shoal Creek is estimated at \$650 million; Glades is estimated at \$350 million. The biggest proponents of new reservoirs are the private landowners, lawyers, consultants, engineers and developers that stand to profit millions of dollars from the permitting and construction of the dams and supporting facilities. A new law adopted by the General Assembly





to provide state funding for public-private reservoir projects has further fueled the rush to build reservoirs with tax dollars. Meanwhile, conservation and efficiency projects that can generate the same water at a fraction of the cost languish because of lack of funding. Georgia's Environmental Protection Division estimates that new reservoirs can cost \$4,000 for every 1,000 gallons of water produced while water conservation measures can produce that same 1000 gallons at a cost of 50 cents to \$250.

The wise use of limited public funds is not all that is at stake with these reservoir projects. The Shoal Creek project would wipe out a pristine stream that has been called the "epicenter" of biodiversity in the Upper Etowah River Basin and kill federally protected Etowah and Cherokee darters—fish that are found nowhere else in the world. As much as 100 million gallons a day would be diverted from the Etowah River and pumped through 38 miles of pipes to Metro Atlanta through an interbasin transfer. It would be the largest water transfer ever permitted in Georgia.

During periods of low flows, such a transfer would be equivalent to nearly 100 percent of the river's flow and could significantly impact water supplies for downstream communities.

Likewise, the proposed Glades Reservoir depends on an elaborate system of pumps and pipes to divert water from the Chattahoochee River above Lake Lanier. This 850-acre reservoir would destroy more than 92,000 linear feet of creeks and streams. It would pull 108 million gallons a day from the Chattahoochee, which is already stressed, divert it into this lake that will provide high-priced lakefront lots for an amenity development.

What Must Be Done:

To ensure enough clean water for future generations, Georgia must put its limited public resources toward conservation and efficiency projects that will yield the most water for the least money and with the least environmental impact.

Gov. Nathan Deal has designated \$300 million over the next four years to develop new water supplies; a task force appointed by the Governor is determining what kinds of projects should be eligible for this funding and how these funds will be distributed. This Task Force should make water conservation and efficiency projects eligible for funding and place priorities on funding water projects that generate the most water at the least cost—both to taxpayers and the environment.

The General Assembly should perfect the law on interbasin transfers, so that EPD is required to conduct thorough studies of the impacts of individual transfers before it issues a permit for these controversial water withdrawals.

The Corps of Engineers should require environmental impact statements (EISs) for all dams and reservoirs to thoroughly evaluate the environmental, social and economic impacts. For the first time in decades, the Corps' Savannah District has ordered an EIS for the Glades Reservoir.

Finally, the state should pursue efforts to better utilize water storage in existing reservoirs, such as proposals to raise the pool levels at lakes Lanier and Allatoona.



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