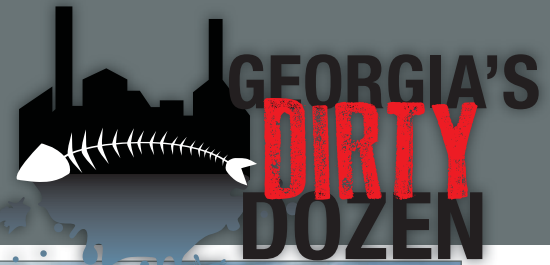


# 2011's worst offenses against Georgia's Water



## #6 Oconee and Ogeechee Rivers: Speculative Coal Plant Permitted Even Though it is Unneeded and Will Harm Water, Air and Fisheries

Airborne mercury from coal-fired power plants is the leading cause of mercury contamination in fish in south Georgia streams. In fact, fish in most south Georgia streams contain mercury in high enough levels to cause birth defects in babies whose mothers eat too many of these fish. Still, EPD has issued permits for a speculative coal-fired power plant in Washington County that will not only spew more mercury into our air and water, but will also deplete flows on the already-stressed Oconee River.

### The River:

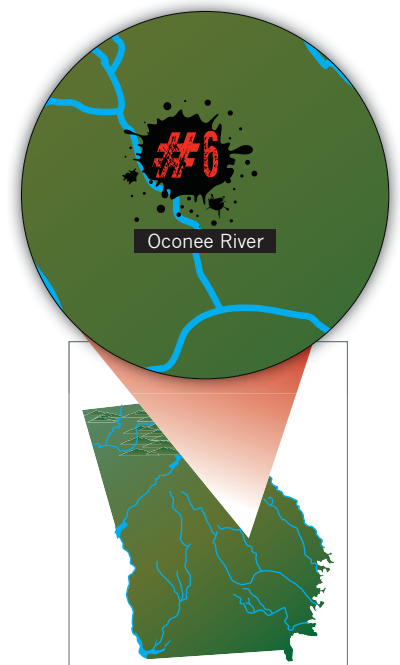
The Oconee River rises near Lake Lanier, and flows southward some 220 miles to join the Ocmulgee River to form the Altamaha River. It flows some 220 miles and drains a basin covering 5,330 square miles. One of Georgia's blackwater rivers, the Ogeechee rises in wetlands near the site of Plant Washington, fed largely by springs from groundwater and flows some 245 miles to the Georgia coast, draining an area of 5,540 square miles.

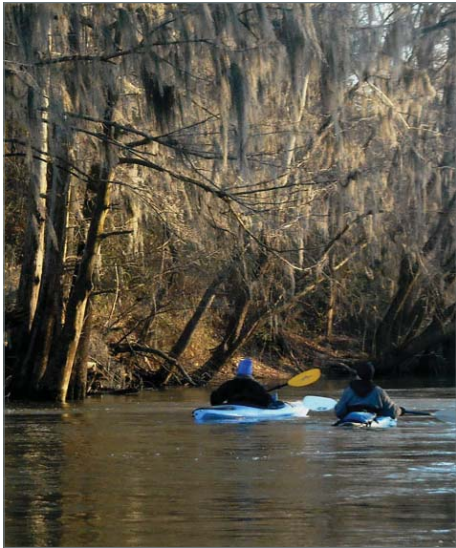
### The Dirt:

It has been more than 20 years since the last coal-fired power plant was built in Georgia, but now Plant Washington is one of three proposed new coal plants that could lock us into this dirty source of power for the next 50 years and beyond.

For decades, coal-fired power plants have polluted Georgia's air and water while being the single largest user of water from our rivers; Plant Washington will be no different. It will emit toxins including mercury, arsenic, lead, and barium into the air. Airborne mercury, will in turn, fall to our rivers where it enters the aquatic food chain. Meanwhile, the massive amounts of water required by the facility will further stress the Oconee and Ogeechee rivers.

As planned, Plant Washington would use up to 16 million gallons of water daily from the Oconee River or from nearby groundwater wells. The water will be evaporated to cool the plants condensers, and on average, 89 percent will never return to either the Oconee or Ogeechee. Such a consumptive use





would reduce flows on either river.

High mercury levels in fish in South Georgia rivers, due largely to the deposition of airborne mercury from coal-fired power plants, threaten the health of all who eat fish from these rivers. Fish consumption guidelines issued by the EPD this year include restrictions on fish caught in both the Oconee and Ogeechee rivers. Adding more toxic pollutants will further harm the fish and the people who eat them. Georgia EPD estimates that 20,000 babies are born in Georgia every year with unsafe levels of mercury in their blood.

The \$2.1 billion, 850-megawatt Plant Washington is a project of Power4Georgians, a consortium of five Electric Membership Corporations (EMCs) led by Cobb EMC. Currently, there is no existing or projected need for the power from this plant in Georgia. Power 4Georgians was organized by Dwight Brown, the former Cobb EMC CEO, now under 35 counts of indictment for racketeering and theft. Brown also created the for-profit subsidiary Cobb Energy and transferred all EMC assets to the for-profit,

charging the non-profit a mark-up which reached 11 percent. Though Brown faces criminal charges, his partner in the Plant Washington project, Dean Alford and Allied Energy Services, continue to push the project.

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

Participating EMCs must terminate their relationship with Power4Georgians and stop additional funding for the continued development of Plant Washington. Members of Snapping Shoals, Central Georgia, Upson and Cobb EMCs should call their EMC boards and ask them to pull out of Plant Washington.

As the largest financial backer of Power4Georgians, Cobb EMC's termination of the project could be the end of it – and reform is on the way. In 2007, fed up Cobb EMC members filed a lawsuit that resulted in a settlement that Cobb Energy be dissolved and the assets transferred back to Cobb EMC. This paved the way for new Cobb EMC Board members to be elected. Already, six of the ten incumbent board members have decided not to seek re-election when they are up in November 2011, February 2012, and May 2012.

The Sierra Club, Ogeechee and Altamaha Riverkeeper, Fall Line Alliance for a Clean Environment, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, GreenLaw, Environment Georgia and Southern Environmental Law Center are working to stop the plant. Visit [www.georgiansforsmartenergy.org](http://www.georgiansforsmartenergy.org) for more information.



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

Seth Gunning, Sierra Club Beyond Coal Organizer, 404-607-1262 x233 [seth.gunning@sierraclub.org](mailto:seth.gunning@sierraclub.org),  
743 E. College Ave Suite B – Decatur, GA 30030, [www.sierraclub.org/coal/ga/default.aspx](http://www.sierraclub.org/coal/ga/default.aspx)