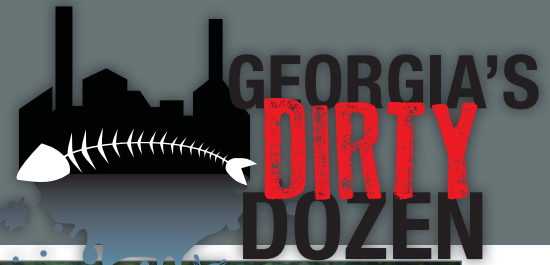


2011's worst offenses against Georgia's Water



#7 Flint River: Flint River Sucked Dry as EPD Allows Too Many Withdrawals

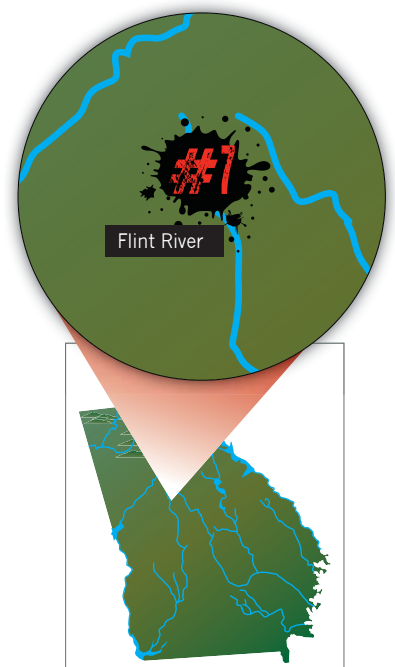
Since 1980, low flows on the upper Flint River have declined 50-70 percent; while flows on the lower Flint have dropped by around 30 percent. Today, summertime flows are routinely so low you can't even float a kayak down the upper reaches of this river, and several major tributaries in the lower Flint completely dry up. From its headwaters beneath Atlanta's airport to its confluence with the Chattahoochee River in southwest Georgia, the Flint is being sucked dry by EPD's out-of-control permitting practices for municipal drinking water, agricultural withdrawals and interbasin transfers.

The River:

The Flint River originates in Metro Atlanta and flows southwest to join the Chattahoochee River at the Florida state line, gathering tributaries over approximately 350 miles and draining an 8,460 square-mile river basin. More than one million Georgians depend upon the Flint. While the Upper Flint provides water supplies for Metro Atlanta, the lower Flint supports some of the most productive agribusiness counties in the state. Like the Chattahoochee, use of the Flint is at the heart of a two-decade-long battle over water rights between Georgia, Alabama and Florida. In 2009, it was named to American Rivers list of the nation's most endangered rivers.

The Dirt:

For more than three decades, EPD has permitted numerous reservoirs, water withdrawals and interbasin transfers in the upper Flint, as well as massive amounts of agricultural withdrawals in the lower Flint. The cumulative impact of these water supply projects has been a dewatering of the Flint. Statistics demonstrate a 50 to 70% decrease in minimum flows in the upper Flint since 1980. At times, flows are so low that commercial canoe and kayak outfitters cannot run trips, and some tributaries cease to flow. In the lower Flint, minimum flows in the mainstem have decreased by 30%, and several major tributaries chronically run dry. The problem has its roots in the state's failed "instream flow policy" which dictates how much water must remain in a river or stream below a dam or municipal or industrial water withdrawal.





In the 1990s state biologists deemed the state's instream flow policy inadequate to protect our water resources. The state was to conduct a study to develop a new standard, but that study has never been funded. Since 2001 Georgia has operated under an interim instream flow policy, and the research to support existing policy still does not exist.

Furthermore, the recently completed regional water plan for the Flint and nine other regions of the state base future water availability on these same unsubstantiated policies. The plan for the Flint is particularly problematic because water planners choose to measure river flows at places where the data will not accurately reflect conditions.

Meanwhile, EPD recently issued yet another permit for a reservoir and water withdrawal permit along the Fayette-Coweta county line, on Line Creek. Plus, several hundred new permits for agricultural withdrawals have been issued in the lower Flint region in 2011.

What Must Be Done:

To protect the Flint, Georgia must address its failed instream flow policy, adjust its permitting policy, perfect its regulations of interbasin transfers and support aggressive water conservation measures for municipal, industrial and agricultural water users.

The Georgia General Assembly should fund an instream flow study so that science-based standards can be enacted to keep enough clean water flowing through our rivers. The permitting process can then be adjusted to reflect all economic and ecological impacts of permitting decisions, not just those affecting the applicant.

Likewise, interbasin transfer rules adopted by the DNR Board in 2011 should be improved to require that EPD thoroughly analyze the impacts of these water diversions before they are permitted.

Finally, the state must invest in water conservation and efficiency measures that will reduce demands and keep more water in the river.

Specifically for the Flint, the GWC recommends that EPD reanalyze data used to formulate a regional water plan for the Flint. Steps should also be taken to restore flows lost to interbasin transfers.



For more Information Contact:

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