

Center Takes Steps to Protect Coastal Rivers, Fisheries

On April 3 the Center for a Sustainable Coast sent a set of recommendations to a state study committee that is charged with developing Georgia water policies. These recommendations follow two previous actions by the Center defending coastal resources, including a water quality petition filed with the Georgia Board of Natural Resources in late November and a subsequent letter to the Director of the Environmental Protection Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

The Center is also among a group of organizations calling for a moratorium on power plant permits in Georgia, pending a report by the Governor's Energy Policy Task Force later this year. Power generation is the single largest water user in the state, even larger than agriculture and industry. Power plants that burn coal and oil also produce mercury, a dangerous neurotoxin.

These actions take on added significance in light of the recent announcement by American Rivers, which proclaimed that the Altamaha is the nation's seventh most endangered river.

In its recommendations, the Center called for stronger measures for evaluating new proposals to use water and for enforcing safeguards already in state and federal laws. Specifically, the focus of the proposal, entitled *"Improving Protection of Coastal Water Resources"* covered four main topics:

- 1. Make more extensive use of information and scientific expertise in evaluating environmental permits under various programs.**
- 2. Minimize flow disruptions in river systems.**
- 3. Restore wetland functions and provide adequate buffers to protect water quality.**
- 4. Consider potential impacts on all down-stream users when making permit decisions by applying the precautionary principle.**

In explaining the recommendations, the Center advised that the state should ensure that no new uses unwisely divert or consume water flowing to the coast, where this flow is needed to support fisheries.

"Even before the current period of drought, salinity in the inter-tidal areas of coastal rivers had been increasing, putting various species of fish at risk, especially in their earlier life stages. Remaining fresh water flowing into Georgia's estuary system is needed to retain the function of this highly valuable habitat, which supports thousands of jobs in commercial and recreational fishing and seafood processing. The economic

importance of these coastal resources is on the order of \$1 billion annually, and putting them at further risk by reducing river flow is directly contrary to the public interest."



The Center executive director, David Kyler, said that this destructive trend of increasing salinity is attributable to several factors, including the depletion of freshwater wetlands by forestry, agriculture, and urban development, as well as excessive withdrawal of groundwater by industry.

Recommendations advised policymakers that restoration of at least some of these lost wetlands and wider buffers along waterways are essential to help protect against further decline in valuable coastal resources.

Actions being proposed by the Center are needed as Georgia's growth imposes increasing burden on natural systems that are not being adequately protected under current practices. "Long-term public interests will be best served by state and local governments learning to regulate the use of resources within sustainable limits of natural processes. The sooner these actions are taken, the less Georgia taxpayers will

ultimately have to pay for improved water resources," the Center declared.

Water resource recommendations are posted on the Center's website [www.sustainablecoast.org] and on the website of the Comprehensive Water Plan Study Committee [www.cviog.uga.edu/water].

ACTION ALERT!!!

***** URGENT & TIME SENSITIVE *****

Our friends at Georgia AirKeepers Campaign, with whom the Center is working on air quality issues, have asked that we enroll support for the CLEAN POWER ACT (Senate Bill 556) to help reduce pollution, such as the mercury contamination of fish described above, by as much as 90%! Over time, it would require every power plant to meet the most recent pollution control standards, erasing the 'grandfather' loophole that exempts dirty plants. Please call or send your statement supporting this bill to both senators today!

Senator Max Cleland phone: 202-224-3521
fax: 202-224-0072

Senator Zell Miller phone: 202-224-3643
fax: 202-228-2090

Please take action now!