

Flint RIVERKEEPER®

Points



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From your Flint Riverkeeper®

It struck me today as I was thinking about where we've been and where we're headed, plus about what all of us together need to make happen in 2015, that it might be useful to think about what the Flint River watershed would be like if Flint Riverkeeper, its members, and its allies in the Georgia Water Coalition, Georgians for Smart Energy, and the (former) Shoal Bass Alliance were not here. A review of recent history can inspire, and teach lessons about what's possible. Here's a partial list of what we have been accomplishing together:

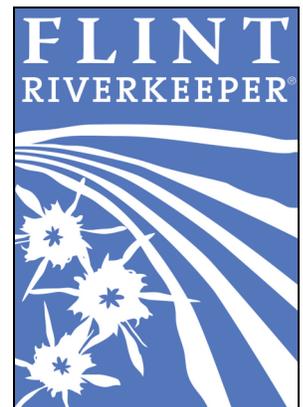
- Millions in federal tax dollars would have been spent on new 'studies' for mainstem dams on the upper Flint, and a permitting process to put those plans into action would likely be underway.
- There would be three immense coal-burning facilities under construction, possibly operational, in south Georgia: one in Ben Hill County, one in Early County, and one in Washington County. These would further deplete the water supply so critical to our rivers, industry, towns and cities, and agriculture.
- There would be a 'recycling' operation for a huge portion of Metro North Georgia's fat/oil/grease waste stream located in Taylor County, funded by a known violator and operated by one of his relatives.
- There would be a dump on a mountainside in Upson County.
- There would be no new watershed organization for the upper Suwannee watershed in Georgia, helping to bolster the Flint's eastern flank, another strong voice for clean abundant water.
- The Southern Mills/TenCate facility in Upson County would be operating with no meaningful oversight or monitoring.
- Over 700 folks would not have experienced the joys of paddling on the Flint River.
- Georgia water law would allow the government to own specific volumes of river flow, isolating it from the citizens and private property owners, exposing portions of our flow to the market.
- There would be no new regulatory structure for shoal bass in the upper Flint, leaving the shoal bass fishery in a poorly-managed state.

Those are just some of what all of us together have accomplished. As we enter our 8th calendar year of existence, nearing our 7th anniversary come June, let's commit to one another to keep up the good work. You'll read in this issue some of what to expect in the legislative session just now underway, a report on the Dougherty/Lee cleanups last autumn, how to help at the legislature come February 18th, a schedule of some fun (we can't work ALL the time), and more. We need you in order to get this work done. The Flint needs all of us.

Thank you, Gordon

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The mission of the Flint Riverkeeper® (FRk) is to restore and preserve the habitat, water quality, and flow of the Flint River for the benefit of current and future generations and dependent wildlife. FRk is a fully-licensed member of the Waterkeeper Alliance, an EarthShare of Georgia member group and participates in the Georgia Water Coalition.



Report wildlife violations
to DNR Law Enforcement: **800-241-4113**;
report pollution issues
to FRk at **229-435-2241**

Preview of 2015 Legislative Session by Gordon Rogers

Some folks call it the 'silly season'. Some say no one's property or pocketbook are safe while it is in session. Some ignore it, at their peril it must be said. Some are attracted to it like flies to honey, or some other substance, because of the massive amounts of public expenditure in play. For those interested in clean, flowing water in Georgia's rivers the legislative session is loaded with both opportunity and danger. If you have followed Flint Riverkeeper's work in the legislature in recent years, conducted in concert with our allies in the Georgia Water Coalition, you know that if we do not pay close attention to what goes on each and every year, and between sessions, private property owners and Georgia's waterways including the Flint will suffer from greedy grabs, bad management and foregone opportunities.

Here is some of what we are already seeing in the 2015 session of the Georgia General Assembly:

- There will be a bill introduced to firmly establish a 25' buffer to protect Georgia's salt marshes. Meanwhile, Georgia's Supreme Court is considering arguments on a case from Grady County that will affect the interpretation of which portions of our freshwater swamps, creeks, and rivers do or do not benefit from a buffer. Eventually, in either this session or 2016, both the salt marsh with its hundreds of miles of edge, and over 70,000 miles of Georgia creek and river banks must be addressed. Pay close attention to this one.
 - Senate Bill 36 has been introduced to permanently ban the practice of aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) in the Floridan Aquifer system in the 11 coastal counties of Georgia (Chatham, Bryan, Liberty, McIntosh, Glynn, Camden, Effingham, Long, Wayne, Brantley, and Charlton). The bill was authored by Senator William Ligon (R-Brunswick) and is sponsored by strong coastal legislators plus Senator Freddie Powell Sims (D-Dawson) of the lower Flint. The bill is written such that additional aquifers, and counties, can be easily added, either during this year's legislative process or in the future. Given the fact that the only active ASR project in Georgia is in Baker County in the Flint watershed, and that the project involves other aquifers (Clayton, Claiborne) in addition to the Floridan, it will be up to us to
- addition to the Floridan, it will be up to us to make our voices heard among our Flint legislators and others that we need this sort of protection as well. A similar bill last year was introduced by Senator Ligon but was not allowed to come to committee vote by Senator Ross Tolleson (R-Perry), chair of the Senate Natural Resources and Environment Committee. Instead Senator Tolleson established a study committee on the topic that met twice and has now produced an extremely biased report. Senator Ligon has filed a dissenting report. Those that wish to see ASR move forward are playing politics, and playing at science. This will be a hard but winnable fight.
- Watch for a bill that would hold municipal water withdrawers to reasonable standards of (clean) return flow before they expand their withdrawals. Last year a similar bill was sponsored by Rep. Johnnie Caldwell (R-Thomaston) and Rep. Debbie Buckner (D-Junction City), plus several from the Columbus delegation. Lynn Smith (R-Newnan), chair of the House Natural Resources and Environment Committee blocked the bill, not even allowing a hearing, much less a vote. It seems that there are those that do not consider it important to return water in a reasonable way to where it came from, Representative Smith chief among them. We applaud Representatives Caldwell and Buckner for continuing this important fight.
 - We are working to get a bill introduced to declare, by resolution, the shoal bass as Georgia's Unique Native Sport Fish. The sporting and other qualities of the shoal bass, including its close association with clean, flowing, unrestricted rivers and large creeks, place it alongside our state freshwater (largemouth bass) and saltwater (red drum) fishes as deserving of special recognition. Anglers come from, literally, all over the world to catch shoalies, and the cadre of dedicated shoal bass fisherfolk in Georgia is large and growing. Miles upon miles of important shoal bass habitat have been eliminated in the Chattahoochee system due to major damming projects and other alterations.

Legislative Preview cont'd- The Flint (upper, middle, and lower) is the center of remaining shoal bass abundance in its range, which includes an important population in Florida's Chipola (tributary of the Apalachicola), plus an introduced population in the upper Ocmulgee. Recognizing the shoal bass in this way will send a message to the angling public and to all that value clean, flowing water that Georgia cares about its unique native species.

We can also expect, as always, to see bills introduced to advantage certain narrow economic interests to lessen pollution control requirements, decrease liability for damages caused by their pollution, make pollution or extraction permits easier to obtain, or cause to happen expensive 'solutions' for water problems that insiders can profit from. Already the Governor's budget shows the elimination of important protections for water quality by eliminating the Soil and Water Conservation Commission. We will be vigilant concerning such activity, and keep you informed. Please be ready to act to contact your representative or senator, sometimes on very short notice. We and our allies in the Georgia Water Coalition will be working hard for you and for the Flint this legislative session.

Sign up for Flint Riverkeeper Action alerts at: www.flintriverkeeper.org/become-a-member and sign up for Georgia Environmental Action Network emails at: www.protectgeorgia.net

Who Owns Water Event Series

Flint Riverkeeper has partnered with Modoc Stories to show the award-winning documentary *Who Owns Water* that documents two brothers' journey through the Apalachicola, Chattahoochee, Flint (ACF) watershed, paddling from source to sea. The 50-minute film will be followed by Q&A from the filmmakers, David and Michael Hanson, along with Flint Riverkeeper Gordon Rogers. We'll be asking attendees to take action to protect the ACF and tax dollars from the state's plan to pump and store Floridan aquifer water into the deeper Claiborne and Clayton Aquifers. Details for each showing are as follows:

- Wednesday, February 4, 7pm, Brooks United Methodist Church, Brooks, GA— free to public— presented by Modoc Stories and Flint Riverkeeper
- Saturday, February 7, 7pm, Baker County School, Newton GA— free to public—presented by Modoc Stories and Flint Riverkeeper
- Monday, February 9, 7pm, Peoples' South (Bank) Community Center, Colquitt, GA—free to public —presented by Modoc Stories and Flint Riverkeeper
- Tuesday, February 10, 7pm, Outside World Outfitters, Columbus, GA: \$10 includes dinner and beverages —presented by Outside World Outfitters and Modoc Stories
- Wednesday, February 11, 6:30pm reception / film starts 7pm, University of North GA, Gainesville, GA—presented by Modoc Stories, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper and Flint Riverkeeper
- Thursday, February 12, 7pm, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA* free to public—Presented by Cherokee Garden Club and Modoc Stories ***Reservations requested. Please RSVP to robincroft4@gmail.com**

Watch the trailer: www.WhoOwnsWater.org

Check www.flintriverkeeper.org OR www.facebook.com/WhoOwnsWater for more details

Keep Albany-Dougherty Beautiful and Lee County Rivers Alive Team Up for Flint— area Clean Up by David Dixon

On Saturday, October 25th, Flint Riverkeeper joined with a number of local volunteer organizations to participate in the annual Albany-area Rivers Alive cleanup funded by Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The groups picked up trash and litter from approximately 50 miles of riverbanks and waters of the Flint and its tributaries, Muckalee and Kinchafoonee Creeks, in Dougherty and Lee County. Volunteers were organized by many groups including FRK's own staffer, Jessica Rutledge, and included folks on the river in various watercraft and bank-walkers. Flint Riverkeeper board member and vice president David Dixon led a group



of scouts and scoutmasters from Albany's St. Theresa's Troop 4 in canoes picking up debris from the Flint River between the Albany Civic Center and Radium Landing . Executive Director and Flint



Riverkeeper Gordon Rogers supplied the FRK boat as a "garbage barge" to collect the various debris and bags of trash from the canoes and kayaks along the waterways. Tons of debris was removed from the water and banks. After the clean-up the volunteers were hosted by the Lee County Sheriff's Department BBQ Cooking Team with a wonderful lunch at Chehaw Park. Groups participating in the event were: Keep Albany-Dougherty Beautiful, Lee County Code Enforcement Department, Jones Ecological Re-

search Center, Darton State College Outdoor Education and Recreation, Chehaw Park, Flint Riverquarium, Kayak Attack, Flint Riverkeeper and a host of individual volunteers. Special thanks to Jim Wright of Lee County Code Enforcement and Judy Bowles of Keep Albany-Dougherty Beautiful for their coordination to make this event a success, and to the Lee County Sheriff's Department for feeding the volunteers a delicious BBQ lunch.



Shoal Bass Now Better Protected in the Middle and Upper Flint by Gordon Rogers

After many years of focused, high-quality research by the Fisheries Section of GA DNR's Wildlife Resources Division, and by researchers at Auburn University, WRD biologists proposed and the DNR Board approved new regulations for conservation of shoal bass in the middle and upper Flint. Now effective, it is illegal to possess a shoal bass less than 15 inches in total length above the dam at Warwick, GA.

The research was a result of years of citizen involvement from the former Shoal Bass Alliance, which has now transferred its assets and its mission to Flint Riverkeeper. FRk has been simultaneously proud to be involved in and humbled by the dedication of the angling community to the cause of shoal bass conservation.

Results from several coordinated studies, including studies downstream of the dam at Warwick conducted by WRD and the University of GA, has shown that while the exploitation rates below Warwick are not such that the size structure of the shoal bass populations in those areas are affected by angling, the upper Flint could definitely benefit from a higher minimum size limit. WRD held hearings on the research and proposed regulations during the summer of 2014, and the DNR Board finalized the regs during the autumn.

The fisheries scientists predict that we will begin to see the benefits of the new regulatory structure in 3 to 5 years in the form of higher-quality (larger) fish in anglers' catches. Nowhere in the Flint are shoalies threatened by overfishing in terms of threats to their existence; however, citizen anglers made clear to the fisheries managers that 'size matters', and the research shows that size can be better managed in the upper Flint.

The research also shows that shoal bass, unlike many of their other black bass cousins (Coosa, largemouth, smallmouth, spotted, et cetera) migrate long distances, upwards of 100 river miles, during the course of each year. Thus, the major threats to shoal bass populations are interruption of those migrations (dams), loss of shoal habitat due to inundation (dams) or flow starvation. Flint Riverkeeper is of course heavily focused on these exact issues.

During the hearings it became evident that enforcement of existing and any new regulations is an issue on the upper Flint. Access to the fishery by anglers and law enforcement personnel is difficult in places, and enforcement activity is frequently focused elsewhere and on other species. Enforcement of shoal bass regulations has been, at best, spotty. However, since the hearings, a major case was made in Upson County that included the use of K-9 talent, literally sniffing out hidden, illegal shoal bass. Tips most definitely help law enforcement officials make good cases. And good cases are a deterrent to other would-be poachers. Access to difficult-to-reach stretches of the river is also handy for LE officers. Plainly there is a role for anglers and landowners in this equation. You can reach DNR LE by using the TIP (Turn In Poachers) hotline at 800-241-4113, and at <http://gadnrle.org/node/2> online. Under certain conditions cash rewards are offered for tips that lead to arrest and conviction. And, as always, you can contact Flint Riverkeeper with any questions or concerns about the Flint.

Dripping Rocks Farm Holiday Dinner Event

Flint Riverkeeper sincerely appreciates all the support of the Dripping Rocks Farm Holiday Dinner Event on November 6, 2014. Attendees, auction donors, sponsors and special gift donors helped raise over \$43,000 to be used for protection and restoration of the Flint River watershed!

It was a beautiful, but chilly, evening at the Dripping Rocks Farm property of Henry and Susan Camp. The party was set atop the northern ridge of The Cove, a geographically stunning location where the river over time has cut through granite instead of flowing around the natural bowl shape unique to this area of Meriwether County along the Pike County border. Delicious food, beautiful scenery, wonderful conversation and special auction items made for a memorable and rewarding event. THANK YOU!

Sincere THANKS to our Event Sponsors

Henry and Susan Camp

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2015 Upcoming Events

Please check flinriverkeeper.org for more details and other events, or call 229.435.2241 with any questions.

February 6-8: Georgia Wildlife Federation Great Outdoors Show, Perry GA; www.gwf.org

February 18: **Capitol Conservation Day, Atlanta GA; registration at www.garivers.org/gawater/events**

June 27: Albany Membership Meeting Fish Fry, location TBA

August, date TBA: Upper Watershed Membership Meeting BBQ and Tubing Trip, Woodbury, GA

September 25: Annual Dinner Event, location TBA, Thomaston, GA

October 8-12: Paddle Georgia’s 2nd Annual Fall Float on the Flint, Albany to Bainbridge, GA; registration opens July 2015, www.garivers.org/paddle_georgia/fallfloat

Other Flint paddle trips and meetings throughout the year will be announced. Sign up for email alerts at www.flinriverkeeper.org/become-a-member to receive information. Also check out page 3 for information about upcoming *Who Owns Water* documentary showings.

Become a Member to Protect YOUR Flint River!

Can you give a generous tax-deductible donation today, to make certain one of Georgia’s most treasured waterways can be saved for current and future generations? To make a donation, visit www.flinriverkeeper.org OR make checks payable to Flint Riverkeeper® and mail this form to 211 N. Jefferson Street, Ste. 8, Albany, GA 31701, or return this form with your credit card information for a secure transaction. Flint Riverkeeper® is a 501c3 charitable organization. **THANK YOU for your support!**

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A confirmation email will be sent to you. Please ensure that we have your email address by completely filling out the form above, as well as your other contact information.

Flint RIVERKEEPER®

**211 N. Jefferson Street
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Phone: 229.435.2241

www.flintriverkeeper.org

Flint Riverkeeper was established in 2008 to address the various issues that are threatening the Flint River and its tributaries. We are working to restore and protect the quality and flow of this immensely valuable resource.

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Your Flint Riverkeeper *Points* is designed and edited by Jayme Smith, with contributions from Gordon Rogers and guest submissions as noted. If you have an issue, article or pictures to share, please contact

jayme@flintriverkeeper.org

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Meet Jessica Rutledge, New FRk Staffer

Originally from Alabama, I have been living in southwest Georgia for the past 14 years. Needless to say, southwest Georgia has rooted itself into my heart. It is where I got my first professional job, met my husband (Brandon), bought my first house, and had two amazing children (Emily, 6 and Henry, 3). This is also where I learned about the Flint River and the longleaf pine ecosystem, developing a love and appreciation for both. I hope to pass along this love and appreciation of nature to my children.



I graduated from Auburn University with a Bachelor's degree in Wildlife Biology and moved to southwest Georgia for a job at the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center. My first job at the Center involved freshwater mussel sampling in surrounding creeks. Little did I know this move would develop into an opportunity to get my Master's degree at the University of Georgia, studying bobcats, and ultimately a position with the Flint Riverkeeper. Upon completion of my graduate degree, I worked in various roles as a Wildlife Biologist at the Center for 11 years conducting terrestrial wildlife research involving small mammals, bobcats, deer and more. It is great to be back in the water arena, where it all began.

After my tenure as a Wildlife Biologist I determined it was time for a change and decided to stay home with my two children. As they grew older, it was time to make another change and go back to work outside of the home. My first step was as a teacher at a day school and now I have joined the Flint Riverkeeper. I couldn't be more excited about working with such a great group of people for an important cause that positively impacts us all as well as the natural resources of Georgia.