



The Garden Club of Georgia, Inc.

Mission: Beautification ... Conservation ... Education

Sowing Seeds of Knowledge

(published monthly to inform and to encourage participation in NGC Schools)

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Because this issue will somewhat unexpectedly cover Georgia's Rivers and the necessary conservation and protection of them, let's begin with the relevant National Garden Clubs, Inc. Conservation Pledge. *I pledge to protect and conserve the natural resources of the planet Earth and promise to promote education so we may become better caretakers of our air, water, forest, land, and wildlife.*

Bad News or an Unexpected Great Opportunity?

Last year at the concluding business meeting of the GCG Convention at Jekyll Island, it was this editor's delight to introduce a former GCG Scholarship recipient, Jenny Hoffner, who has benefitted, moved ahead, and succeeds in part thanks to our help. We simply do not have contact information for most of our recipients; therefore, recent contact with Jenny was an unexpected and welcomed bit of serendipity. Jenny, based in the American Rivers Decatur office, currently serves as a Vice President for American Rivers, Inc., with headquarters in Washington. This year in Macon, asked by our Legislative & Governmental Affairs Chairman to announce the American Rivers selection of the Most Endangered American River for 2016 became a duty for this editor. That announcement had been made public by American Rivers on April 11th, the day before our Convention began, and the timing came as a bit of a shock. Who really wants to be known as the worst of anything?

Being first at anything is generally welcomed and cheered, especially the morning after one of our somewhat raucous GCG Awards Banquets, but the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) River Basin in Georgia as the national Number One most endangered waterway for 2016 wasn't exactly happy news to announce. It was presented as a challenge for GCG to meet, another problem for it to help solve. A solution or many solutions, whatever happens, is best considered a challenge and opportunity for all GCG members to follow the tenets of our Water Position Paper and to make contact wherever possible before our clubs break for the summer. Within GCG, four of our seven districts Laurel, Redbud, Dogwood, and Magnolia, are included within the ACF basin. Because so much of Georgia's borders are other rivers and other bodies of water, what happens in the ACF Basin influences all our Districts. You can read prime source details about the choice for yourself on its website at americanrivers.org.

The Announcement Itself:

Ten most endangered Rivers for 2016 from American Rivers:

#1: Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin

(Alabama, Florida, Georgia)

Threat: Outdated water management

A water conflict has been raging in the Southeast for more than two decades, and rivers and communities are at a breaking point. Outdated water management practices and wasteful water use threaten the Apalachicola, Chattahoochee and Flint rivers – the source of metro Atlanta’s drinking water and lifelines for agriculture, industry, fisheries and recreation. Unless Georgia, Alabama and Florida reach a transparent water-sharing agreement that protects both people and wildlife throughout the basin, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers improves water management, the region will face lasting economic and irreversible environmental damage.

- See more at: <http://www.americanrivers.org/blog/most-endangered-rivers-2016/#sthash.J7Y7pzok.dpuf>

A Bit of Background:

Geography is Involved:

- Look carefully at a Georgia map and especially at its western borders for some of why of what is happening. Note that the Chattahoochee forms much of Georgia’s border with Alabama. That, too, is part of what will be important in any untying the Florida/ Georgia Gordian knot.
- At Lake Seminole, one of many dam created lakes, the Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers join to become the lake and as the Apalachicola River, many of those waters flow through the Florida panhandle into Apalachicola Bay and into the Gulf of Mexico. The impact of less and/or contaminated water has an enormous impact on recreation and the economy of this region, too.
- Before Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia’s recent death, the Supreme Court appointed a Special Master, a Maine judge charged with encouraging Florida and Georgia to take a special opportunity to settle their disputes before the case is heard before the Supreme Court.
- Attorneys for both states have met on several occasions and have essentially made little progress. Special Master Pierce Atwood has recently chided Georgia for a lack of action. Consider that it may be to the advantage of both states to keep the matter unresolved. That way, neither will be penalized. Moreover, please consider that the attorneys involved are likely not meeting alone in tents out in a wilderness, eating mostly Ramen noodles and doing completely pro bono work via smoke signals in order to save both states funds as they attempt to make recognizable progress.
- Point to ponder: Why is Florida not also suing Alabama? Alabama shares much of the Chattahoochee and also withdraws water from it for manufacturing, farming, and for operating power plants, the largest consumers of waters.

Funding is involved:

- According to Ron Crawford in the Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC) on 4/15/16 Georgia’s Governor emergency fund.
- Also from Crawford, “the amount of money Georgia has shelled out to pay the legal fees related to water allocation is probably well in excess of \$20 million by now, perhaps closer to \$30 million” speaks loudly enough to receive attention.

For more detailed information go to any search engine or to Facebook or other online media and search items like FL/GA Water Disputes. Choose reputable, peer reviewed sources for information. You will gain knowledge about the enormity of the ongoing disputes. The “water wars” are essentially not about politics, but be assured that there are those who will likely use the problem to foster their personal politics, especially in an election year. This reminds some of us of Charles Dickens’s Bleak House where the plot line involves a multi-decade and generational settling of an estate in which - you guessed it - the lawyers were paid over and over and over, essentially absorbing much of the corpus of the estate.

Be aware and beware that there may well be those who will capitalize on the problem that is primarily a conservation matter, not a political one, and try their best to make water use about politics, power plants and manufacturing. Be prepared for attempts to make the issue become one for politics rather than about conservation and ecology. GCG is clearly about conservation and ecology, not about politics.

Pertinent Developments since the American Rivers Announcement and Special Opportunities:

- Of note is that the current GA EPD (Environmental Protection Division) Director who on Earth Day last year rolled back coastal buffer protection regulations from 25' to an effectively undefinable "wrested vegetation" limit. He has resigned, effective June first of this year.
- He has been appointed by the Governor to the group representing Georgia in settling the Florida brought lawsuit over ACF water withdrawals.
- Flint Riverkeeper Gordon Rogers who has spoken frequently at GCG events and explains complicated matters with specific and simple language has announced an impending lawsuit against a manufacturer of protective gear for oil refinery workers, firefighters, and soldiers. The company involved, TenCate Protective Fabrics, is located in Molena GA. The dyeing and finishing plant discharges noxious and dangerous chemicals into creeks that flow into the nearly 350 mile long Flint River. Such is in violation of the Federal Clean Water Act. More details are available in the 5/25/16 AJC.

GCG members can always learn more. The current rivers question is an outstanding example of opportunity. One of the purposes of this publication is to encourage participation in NCG sponsored courses. All members of GCG clubs are eligible to attend them. People who are not members are also eligible to attend such courses, but will not receive credit for certification as NCG Environmental, Gardening Study, or Landscape Design Consultants. Taking these courses will increase knowledge, and if members have other members and guests join them in such adventures, perhaps the guests will become members, too, and support the "... Conservation ... Education" portions of the GCG Mission. Consider also that auditing them could be a possibility.

GCG has wonderful opportunities to make conservation happen, especially when its members realize that they are one highly respected and valuable group to speak with other groups. It is important for such groups to work together for common goals as they maintain their autonomy. Equally important is for members to stay in touch with their elected officials, to ask them to explain their statements and votes, to thank them for their public service, and to let them know how their constituents (a vital word with great power) want to be represented. The often used word is accountability.

Much can also be learned about learning from being with children. Years ago two busloads of intercity children on a field trip went to see a river and to learn about Native Americans. One young boy who had never seen a river before stood on the bank almost hypnotized by the fish traps and the Etowah River at the Indian Mounds Georgia State Parks Historic Site. He looked up to a chaperone asked, "When does all that water stop coming?"

Children's books can be powerful learning tools, too. Again, as a recommended book, NGC's The Frightened Frog is a wonderful resource and gift for children, schools, and libraries. Any NGC member can buy one and give it away. Schools and teachers like it especially because it contains lesson plans. Anyone who has been a GCG member for five or more years surely remembers Dr. Seuss's The Lorax and its message, "I speak for the Trees for the trees have no tongues."

On an especially happy note for GCG, now would be a good time to thank the Governor for his veto of Senate Bill #383, the billboard bill that was touted as not being about billboards, but which contained enough loopholes for some Senators and House Representatives to come back next year with what they frequently refer to as "a little housekeeping measure" that could quickly change the entire effect of the Bill.

Outstanding example of how to participate - one club's remarkable statement and opportunity met: Not to scoop a club's creative effort because you will read about it and see the photos elsewhere, but a GCG club's Earth Day 2016 effort was to take a Youth Gardening group, dressed in matching green t-shirts to the Capitol on April 22nd. to visit with their House Representative and the House Speaker in the House Chamber for a discussion about Georgia's waters and their importance. Each child had a sign with a topic

for discussion. Great GCG incentive! Great opportunity! Great great meeting of a challenge! [N.B. Especially outside General Assembly Session times, be sure make an appointment to meet with your elected officials before showing up at the Capitol.]

Please keep GCG informed about your club's special efforts for Conservation, especially, about Water. You can use marmgl@bellsouth.net. as contact. Together, GCG can accomplish wonders for Water.