

# The great water divide

*Severe drought exposed Alabama's and Georgia's mismanagement of water resource*

By **JOE COOK**  
and **APRIL HALL**

**I**n the midst of our region's worst drought on record, Georgia and Alabama's governors have engaged in a battle of finger-pointing. The heart of the fight stems from operations of dams owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

But what our rivers and reservoirs need is a lot less finger-pointing and a lot more action on the part of our states' leaders and citizens.

As the drought has worsened, the Corps of Engineers has managed to appease neither Georgia nor Alabama.

Indeed, earlier this month, Alabama Gov. Bob Riley sent a scathing letter to the corps in response to reduced flows at

Georgia dams. He reiterated his stance last week at a press conference on the grounds of the Farley Nuclear Plant near the Alabama-Georgia border.

Meanwhile, Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue continually leverages U.S. congressional delegates to intervene on his state's behalf.

In fact, Georgia is now trying to leverage the president to declare a state of emergency and thus bypass the federal Endangered Species Act and keep more water in Lake Lanier. Gov. Riley followed up with his own letter to the president warning of impacts to downstream industries and communities.

Regardless of the back-and-forth of state-level political ploys it appears that a federal judge will ultimately decide how these waters are divvied up. In September, multi-year court-ordered mediation sessions aimed at reaching a water sharing agreement for the Alabama-Coos-

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JOHN BAZEMORE/Associated Press

exposed lake bed, above, is shown at Lake Lanier in Buford, Ga. ers throughout the Southeast are turning to dust and towns are atening to ration dwindling water supplies as the region struggles an epic drought. At right, Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue, left, and ama Gov. Bob Riley are shown at a news conference in Colum- Ga., in August 2006 to discuss the ending of the water-sharing ute between the two states.

# The great Alabama-Georgia water divide

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Tallapoosa river system were finally terminated.

While the Corps of Engineers has taken the brunt of the states' angst during this water crisis, the corps is not the only source of our water woes, as our leaders would have us believe.

A significant cause of these conflicts is a failure on the part of both Georgia and Alabama to wisely manage our states' abundant water resources.

This year's drought has merely revealed the mud flats of our mismanagement.

For example, despite legislation passed in Georgia six years ago, the 16-county metropolitan Atlanta region is not implementing key conservation measures that could save almost 100 million gallons a day. These measures include water efficient plumbing installed in homes for sale and repairs of leaking pipes.

Interbasin transfers (pumping water from one river basin to another) to supply Atlanta's

super-sized thirst withhold more than 100 million gallons a day from downstream users on the Coosa and Chattahoochee rivers. This is enough water to meet the needs of at least 700,000 people.

Instead of finding ways to prevent the escalation of these transfers, Metro Atlanta plans an increased reliance on these transfers — more than double the current amount from the Coosa by 2030.

Even Georgia's in-the-works statewide water management plan falls short at preventing these outrageous consumptive losses from the Coosa and Chattahoochee.

The plan is scheduled to be adopted by the Georgia Legislature in 2008. Georgia river advocates are working to include protections for downstream communities.

In Alabama, water planning is even further behind. Alabama has made little or no effort to draft its own water policy.

A weak drought management plan promises only discussion and monitoring, but no real action.

The state continues to register water

withdrawals, with no attempt to try to manage them. Conservation measures have only been implemented in a handful of Alabama cities, and even then with great reluctance and public outcry.

Moreover, there is currently no enforceable policy in Alabama to help allocate and conserve water.

If the troubled waters flowing across state lines are ever to be peaceful, our leaders must take two important steps:

■ Georgia, and Metro Atlanta in particular, must meet conservation requirements already outlined in existing plans and increase its water efficiency.

This can be accomplished by adopting and funding a state water plan that forces water conservation and limits interbasin transfers.

■ Alabama should follow Georgia's lead and begin immediately developing a plan that will ensure enough clean water for this and future generations as well as the wildlife that depend upon clean, abundant water.

Clearly, it's time for leaders in both states to stop the finger-pointing and get to work.