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UCR convinces Fulton County airport to offset impacts to river

ATLANTA – Georgia’s Environmental Protection Division (EPD) has withdrawn a variance it had issued to Fulton County-Charlie Brown Airport that had authorized the clear-cutting of 17 acres of river and stream buffer alongside the Chattahoochee River, Sandy Creek, a major tributary to the river, and 15 smaller tributaries. This action was in response to an appeal by UCR.

Earlier this year, the Fulton County Airport applied to EPD for a variance to clear-cut 17 acres of vegetated stream buffer as part of a larger plan to clear 150 acres surrounding the airport runways. The 25-foot, state-protected buffer is critical to filtering stormwater runoff, cooling waterways with shade, and providing food and habitat for wildlife.

UCR appealed the variance issued by EPD because the county failed to include, and EPD failed to require, plans for mitigation that would have helped offset the loss of the critical buffer functions.

After filing a petition to appeal the variance, and initial settlement discussions, EPD decided to withdraw the variance it had issued in the late summer. The county airport has pledged to revise its clearing plans to minimize impacts in the buffers and include appropriate mitigation to offset any buffer impacts, while meeting Federal Aviation Administration regulations. UCR has been assured that we will be involved in any future attempt by the airport to seek a buffer variance.

“We agree that the airport needs to be operated according to all air safety regulations, but the real damage that will occur to the environment must be mitigated,” UCR Executive Director Sally Bethea said. “For now, the trees that line the banks of the Chattahoochee River and Sandy Creek near Charlie Brown Airport will continue to help keep these important waterways clean.”

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