

## Op-Ed

7/8/11

**Act now to tell our Congressional rep to stop H.R. 2018 (Dirty Water Bill), up for a vote this week**

**By Sally Bethea**

It's hard for some Georgians to remember, but there was a time when our nation's rivers caught on fire because they were filled with toxic waste. Other waterways were filled with sludge worms feasting on partially treated sewage downstream of cities.

Thanks to the passage of the federal **Clean Water Act in 1972**, we have made significant progress in restoring our rivers, lakes and coast to protect drinking water supplies, recreational areas and downstream property values.

Forty years later, there is an aggressive effort to dismantle this federal law with a bill introduced in Congress just a few weeks ago — the **Clean Water Cooperative Federalism Act (H.R. 2018)**. Don't be fooled by the name. **This legislation would gut the Clean Water Act and jeopardize the gains that we have made over four decades.**

Proponents of H.R. 2018 want to remove key components of federal oversight and place them squarely on the shoulders of the states – whose water-quality standards and enforcement capability vary wildly. If it passes, this legislation will remove the important role of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in ensuring a level playing field across our county by shifting its existing powers to the states. H.R. 2018 would:

- **Prevent** the EPA from stepping in if Georgia fails to adequately protect our waterways from pollution,
- **Discourage** informed decision making on federal permits that impact water quality and public health,
- **Prevent** the EPA from updating outdated and ineffective water quality standards, and
- **Undermine** EPA's ability to protect states from cross-border pollution.

Proponents of the bill argue that it will prevent EPA from “abusing its powers” and save taxpayer dollars. Yet, according to a cost estimate prepared by the Congressional Budget Office, **EPA has rarely used its most powerful regulatory tools to veto projects and has never withdrawn a state's authority to administer the Clean Water Act.** The report goes on to say that “enacting this legislation would not have a significant impact on EPA's budget to implement the Clean Water Act.”

In the late 1990s, acting under its Clean Water Act authority, EPA played a critical role in working with Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper to **force an overhaul of the city of Atlanta's sewage system and stop the discharge of billions of gallons of untreated sewage and**

**polluted stormwater into the Chattahoochee every year.** This cleanup program helped avoid a building moratorium in the city and ultimately accommodated significant in-town development.

Likewise, in the early 2000s, EPA played an important role in protecting water quality in Lake Lanier, the primary source of drinking water for metro Atlanta and a popular recreational destination, from excessive nutrient pollution.

**The strength of the Clean Water Act lies in its balance of shared authority between the federal government and the states,** which too often face pressure by special interests to weaken water quality standards in the name of short-term financial gain — and with long-term damage to our waterways.

By every objective measure, the Clean Water Act works. Let's not deny Americans, and especially our fellow Georgians, the basic right to clean water.

**Contact your Congressional representative today and urge them to oppose H.R. 2018. See [www.congress.org](http://www.congress.org).**

Sally Beathea

Executive Director and Riverkeeper

Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper

Contact: 404-352-9828, ext. 11; [sbethea@ucriverkeeper.org](mailto:sbethea@ucriverkeeper.org)

**NOTE: CONGRESSIONAL REPS IN CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER WATERSHED**

Rep. Sanford Bishop (D), 2nd District, (202) 225-3631

Lynn Westmoreland (R)], 3rd District, 202-225-5901

Hank Johnson (D), 4th District, 202-225-1605

John Lewis (D), 5th District, 202-225-3801

Tom Price (R), 6th District, 202-225-4501

Rob Woodall (R), 7th District, 202-225-4272

Tom Graves (R), 9th District, 202-225-5211

Paul Broun (R), 10th District, 202-225-4101

Phil Gingrey (R), 11th District, 202-225-2931

David Scott (D), 13th District, 202-225-2939