



3 Puritan Mill 916 Joseph Lowery Blvd. Atlanta, GA 30318 404-352-9828 Fax 404-352-8676 www.chattahoochee.org

Contact: Mary Harrison, UCR, 404-352-9829/24

Juliet Cohen, UCR, 404-352-9828/13

## **STATE PERMIT WILL HARM PRISTINE SECTION OF CHATTAHOOCHEE**

September 17, 2010 - Atlanta, GA – Yesterday Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (UCR) appealed a permit issued by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) to Forsyth County to discharge six million gallons daily (MGD) of treated wastewater into the Chattahoochee River from its Fowler / Shakerag Wastewater Reclamation Facility.

UCR filed the appeal after learning that EPD issued the wastewater discharge permit with unnecessarily weak permit limits, allowing excessive phosphorous and fecal coliform to enter the high quality waters of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area (CRNRA). The CRNRA is enjoyed by thousands of people each year for fishing, kayaking, and other forms of recreation. UCR is being represented by Andy Thompson and Steve O'Day, attorneys with Smith, Gambrell, and Russell, LLP, who filed the appeal in the State Office of Administrative Hearings.

The new permit will result in the needless degradation of water quality in this pristine part of the Chattahoochee River by allowing excessive levels of phosphorous and fecal coliform to be discharged from the new facility. The level of fecal coliform authorized to be discharged under the new permit is between 10 and 100 times higher than the level permitted in other wastewater permits and exceeds what is allowed even for golf course irrigation. Additionally, the permitted phosphorous levels exceed the in-stream standard for phosphorous recommended by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Fecal coliform is an "indicator bacteria" which shows the presence of fecal contamination (i.e., human or animal waste) containing microbiological organisms such as pathogenic bacteria and viruses that can cause illnesses in humans. Phosphorous is a nutrient that when discharged in wastewater into a water body such as the Chattahoochee River can cause, among other things, algal blooms and the reduction of oxygen needed to support fish and aquatic organisms.

(cont.)

The new permit is a step backward for state water quality as EPD has issued other wastewater discharge permits in the Chattahoochee River Basin with tighter constraints on phosphorous and fecal coliform, resulting in the discharge of a higher quality wastewater. In fact, Forsyth County is one of at least three utilities already operating a wastewater treatment facility with significantly tighter discharge limits for phosphorous and fecal coliform.

UCR Executive Director Sally Bethea said, “By issuing this permit, EPD has ignored the capability of existing, achievable technologies to produce a high quality effluent and has instead set the bar to the lowest common denominator, settling for obsolete permitting standards that threaten public health and the quality of the state’s waters.”

Established in 1994, Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (UCR) is an environmental advocacy organization with 4800 members dedicated solely to protecting and restoring the Chattahoochee River, its lakes and tributaries, for the people, fish and wildlife that depend upon it. The Chattahoochee River is the primary drinking water source for 3.5 million people.

# # #