

JOINT WEST GEORGIA RIVER PROTECTION

ACT STUDY COMMITTEE

Report of the Committee

December 31, 1999

Georgia General Assembly

Georgia House of Representatives

JOINT WEST GEORGIA RIVER PROTECTION

ACT STUDY COMMITTEE

Members of the Committee

Senator Ed Harbison
Senator Rick Price
Senator Sam Roberts
Senator Mike Polak

Representative Carl Von Epps
Representative Tracy Stallings
Representative Jack West
Representative Lynn Westmoreland

Staff

Kim Crowell
Senate Secretary

Tom Gehl
Senate Research Office

K. Gardner Sapp
House Research Office

*This report is submitted pursuant to the following resolution,
Senate Resolution 184, Part 5,
which created the Joint West Georgia River Protection Act
Study Committee,
to which members were appointed
by the President of the Senate
and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

Senate Resolution 184

A RESOLUTION

Creating the Joint West Georgia River Protection Act Study Committee; and for other purposes.

Part 5

WHEREAS, the rivers of West Georgia are a vital and important resource which provide drinking water and recreational opportunities to the citizens of the State of Georgia; and

WHEREAS, the protection of these vital resources is critical to the prosperity of West Georgia and the citizens of the entire state; and

WHEREAS, there exists a need for a thorough and comprehensive study of steps to protect and improve the waters of these rivers, to lessen the impact of development on these ecosystems, and to prevent the erosion of riverbanks in this area of the state; and

WHEREAS, Coweta County has adopted zoning ordinances to protect these river corridors; and

WHEREAS, Carroll, Heard, and Troup counties also have a vital interest in protecting these resources; and

WHEREAS, a study should be undertaken to assist the General Assembly in determining the need for and details of a West Georgia River Protection Act to preserve and enhance the rivers of the above-named counties.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA that there is created the Joint West Georgia River Protection Act Study Committee, to be composed of five members of the Senate appointed by the President of the Senate and five members of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, with consideration given to the appointment of those members of the General Assembly who represent Coweta, Heard, Troup, and Carroll counties. The President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House shall each designate a member of the committee as co-chairperson of the committee. The co-chairpersons shall call all meetings of the committee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the committee shall undertake a study of the conditions, needs, issues, and problems mentioned above or related thereto and recommend any actions or legislation which the committee deems necessary or appropriate. The committee may conduct such meetings at such places and at such times as it may deem necessary or convenient to enable it to exercise fully and effectively its powers, perform its duties, and accomplish the objectives and purposes of this resolution. The members of the committee shall receive the allowances authorized for legislative members of interim legislative committees but shall receive the same for not more than five days unless additional days are authorized. The funds necessary to carry out the provisions of this resolution shall come from the funds appropriated to the Senate and the House of Representatives. In the event the committee makes a report of its findings and recommendations, with suggestions for proposed legislation, if any, such report shall be made on or before December 1, 1999. The committee shall stand abolished on December 1, 1999.

Introduction

The state of Georgia's rivers has always been a topic of concern, recently more so. Metropolitan Atlanta has had a tremendous impact on the Chattahoochee River's water quality and certain counties downstream have been affected. The implementation of a consent order for the City of Atlanta may have unforeseen implications downstream by the parties thereto, and future development in the counties downstream of Atlanta threatens the Chattahoochee River ecosystem. In an effort to identify, study and thwart

similar problems experienced by the City of Atlanta with regard to water quality, river protection and development along the Chattahoochee River, the West Georgia River Protection Act Study Committee was formed.

The Committee established a number of goals: to explore the feasibility of establishing uniform land use planning measures among Coweta, Heard, Carroll and Troup counties; to examine the Governor's plan to develop green-space along the Chattahoochee Corridor from Atlanta south to Columbus; to study the effects and implementation of the consent order entered into with the City of Atlanta within the context of the Chattahoochee Corridor south of the city; and to consider other issues related to the cleanliness of the river and its watershed south of Atlanta.

Hearings

The Committee scheduled seven (two per day on two meeting dates) meetings over the course of three months. These meetings took place September 10th in Atlanta, September 27th in Coweta and Troup counties, October 19th in Carroll and Heard counties, October 25th in Atlanta for public comment and November 22nd in Atlanta for finalization of report and recommendations.

Members heard from city and county officials, interested organizations and the general public.

Findings

From these meetings, the Committee has drawn a number of findings:

1. There is a common interest among Carroll, Coweta, Heard and Troup counties with regard to water protection for the Chattahoochee River. This interest is manifest in the concerns voiced in meetings and there seems to be a willingness to participate in some type of unified plan to address river concerns.
2. There exists a need for an alliance of local governments and citizens so one voice may be heard with regard to water quality and development concerns along the Chattahoochee River downstream from Atlanta. There is not a uniform voice to protect local interests.
3. Further study is necessary to identify a governance structure which is appropriate for, and capable of responding to river protection issues.
4. There is a need for public education regarding the treatment of lands bordering the Chattahoochee River to prevent further degradation of the water quality and erosion of the riverbank.

5. There is a need for a comprehensive and clearly stated water management policy which is based upon sound data.
 6. There is a need for refinement of the process by which water is allocated.
 7. There is a need for coordination between the objectives of the Governor's Greenspace Initiative and the development activities of local governments and citizens.
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Recommendations

Having heard all interested parties, considered our findings, and deliberated the current state of the Chattahoochee downstream of Atlanta, the Committee suggests the following recommendations to Members of the General Assembly for its consideration:

1. Passage of a resolution extending the life of the Joint West Georgia River Protection Act Study Committee with consideration of a clause to offer assistance and coordination between the Committee and the Governor's Greenspace Committee. The chief purpose for continued study is to promote continued discussion among the four counties and to have them be heard as one voice.
2. Passage of a resolution urging the counties upstream and downstream of Atlanta (those not under the jurisdiction of the Atlanta Regional Commission) to develop and enforce standardized land use and zoning plans for the Chattahoochee River corridor, and to consider tax incentives for environmental easements along the river corridor.
3. Consideration of legislation modeled after the Metropolitan River Protection Act which would cover Carroll, Heard, Coweta and Troup counties in the Chattahoochee watershed, but specifically exclude them from the Atlanta Regional Commission's jurisdiction.
4. Consider funding methods to increase public awareness through environmental education regarding the best practices for protecting the river corridor upstream and downstream of Atlanta. Specifically, partner with interested organizations to develop an elementary school curriculum which teaches voluntary individual homeowner responsibility for watershed protection. Use existing extension agencies as a community resource to provide literature, plant material suggestions and guidance.