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ACF Water War: Focus on Agriculture

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Abstract:

ACF Water War:

Focus on Agriculture

Since 1990 Florida and Alabama have challenged Georgias access and use of the waters in the Chattahoochee and Flint rivers. For most of the eighteen years the debate has been primarily focused on the growth of the metropolitan Atlanta region and its impact on Lake Lanier and consequently on downstream flows in the Chattahoochee. With five major USACE reservoirs on the Chattahoochee and none on the Flint nearly everyone involved looked to the Corps to resolve the issue by better management of the reservoirs. While there continues to be considerable emphasis on reservoir management, drought conditions beginning in 2006 coupled with dramatically low levels in Lake Lanier have resulted in a re-examination of the problem. The pro Atlanta water community seems to have changed their justification/defense from the demands of being the southeast's major metropolitan hub to pointing out that agriculture in the Flint basin is really the largest consumer of ACF water. A biological opinion on the USACE revised operating plan for Woodruff dam and associated releases to the Apalachicola River issued by the USF&WS in June of 2008 quantifies the depletion to the flow of the ACF by user. Agriculture is credited with 59% of all depletion and 67% of manageable depletion (net depletion minus evaporation) in the document.

With well over 500,000 irrigated acres in the Flint basin the economic impact of any reduction in agricultural production could be grave for the predominately rural southwest Georgia region. This paper examines the potential for agriculture to be part of a solution to the ACF dispute and the consequences to irrigators and the region.

Impact Statement:

Proper consideration of agricultural water users right to access will be critical to the regional economy and the future of irrigated agriculture in the Southeast. Unlike municipal and industrial users agriculture has no central voice. Therefore we are seeking to educate policy makers to the implications of potential resolutions on all users.

Category: Conservation and Resource Management

Type of Presentation: Oral Presentation