

Lt. Gov. Cagle: Georgia must act decisively to protect its water

Published in the Gainesville Times July 30, 2009.

For over 40 years, Georgia has been the economic engine of the South. Our state's and region's growth and prosperity have been made possible through proper use of our abundant natural resources. Since the development of Buford Dam and Lake Lanier, our state and the metro Atlanta region have flourished.

However, I am gravely concerned about Georgia reaching its full potential in light of the recent U.S. District Court opinion limiting our access to Lake Lanier as a source for drinking water. The ruling, which threatens to short-circuit Georgia's growth and undermine our well-being, is the single most troubling event I have witnessed in my 15 years of public service. It completely fails to acknowledge a guiding principle I believe must define our state's position on this issue: Georgia has a fundamental right to the water that originates from its rivers and rain.

Prior to the 2009 legislative session, I stated my firm belief that "when it comes to Georgia water on Georgia soil, we cannot retreat." For nearly two decades, Georgia, Alabama, and Florida have been locked in a legal dispute over the use of water from the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin. Following the court's ruling, we now face a three-year deadline to resolve this issue, or a vital water source for our state may be reallocated.

This ruling must not be allowed to stand, and for all Georgians it is an urgent call to action. While the process continues in the courts and Congress, I will be working tirelessly with Georgia citizens and leaders to come together, develop a long-term solution that ensures fair access to our water, and stop other states from staking illegitimate claims on

our resources. Georgia's water must first take care of Georgians, and no outside judge or politician should be allowed to dictate otherwise.

At the state level we must revisit our entire inventory of water resources and maximize the benefits of each. Beyond our 13 reservoirs currently online, Georgia has more than 100 quarries that have been targeted as potential water sources.

Additionally, the legislature must act to increase incentives for conscientious consumption and reuse. By furthering our reputation as good stewards of our limited resources, Georgia maintains its strong case for continued responsible utilization.

Finally, we need to re-examine use of water resources originating within our own borders, namely the Chattahoochee River.

Our success cannot hinge on a single elected official acting alone. In the coming weeks and months, I will be working with a coalition of upstream and downstream business, community and public policy leaders partnering to protect Georgia's resources. With three years to reach an amicable resolution, Georgia is on the clock and we must be united, creative, and aggressive to be successful.

Nothing can be gained by Monday-morning quarterbacking or lamenting missed opportunities. The future of our state hangs in the balance and only a comprehensive approach will achieve an acceptable result.

Our quality of life and economic vitality depend on actions taken over the next three years. Now is the time to execute our plan and protect our future.