

A photograph of a child sitting on a wooden dock, viewed from behind. The child is wearing a dark blue baseball cap with red dots, a dark blue sweatshirt with the number '19' in white, blue jeans, and black sneakers with blue socks. A red fishing rod is lying on the dock to the left. The background is a calm body of water with a dense line of green trees in the distance.

# ALABAMA WATER AGENDA

A GUIDE FOR ACHIEVING HEALTHY WATERS IN ALABAMA





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Thank you to the photographers who allowed us to use their images of Alabama's rivers:

Pg 2, 4, and 5 Charles Seifried;  
Pg 7 Nelson Brooke;  
Pg 8 (left column) Nelson Brooke (right column) Hunter Nichols; Pg 9 (left column, top to bottom) Nelson Brooke, Hunter Nichols, Nelson Brooke (right column, top to bottom) Nelson Brooke, Nelson Brooke, National Resources Defense Council;  
Pg 10 and 11 (center) Cahaba River Society; Pg 11 (right) Charles Seifried;  
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# ALABAMA WATER AGENDA

## A GUIDE FOR ACHIEVING HEALTHY WATERS IN ALABAMA

Alabama is a water-rich state. With more than 77,000 miles of rivers and streams, Alabama ranks sixth in the nation for the most continuously flowing streams. Engraved in the Alabama state seal, our rivers are major components of our natural and cultural heritage.

Essential to our economy, ecology, and society, Alabama's rivers also supply us with drinking water and play a critical role in transportation, irrigation, and industry. They generate power, provide habitat for wildlife, and offer us natural places to swim, fish, boat, camp, hike, and play. Groundwater from underground aquifers supplies Alabama with drinking and irrigation water and provides the base flow for the rivers and streams that we enjoy and on which we depend. Public and private reservoirs like Lake Martin and Smith Lake are used for drinking water as well as for recreation. Our coastal areas and wetlands sustain commercial and recreational uses, provide unique ecological habitat, and protect surrounding areas against hurricanes and floods.

With so many uses and functions, it is clear that we need to keep our waters healthy in order to maintain our communities and economies. Native fish and wildlife also depend on clean, healthy waters. Because of its diverse waterways, **Alabama ranks fifth in the nation in plant and animal diversity and first in freshwater species diversity. Unfortunately, Alabama also ranks fourth for number of species at risk for extinction.** Protecting our waterways is not only vital to our future, it will also help to sustain our amazing array of native species.

To date, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) has only fully assessed a small segment (about seven percent by mile) of Alabama's rivers, so the actual quality of most of our waterways is unknown. Worse yet, over 40 percent of those streams that have been fully assessed are considered to have poor water quality—further indication of just how badly our waters are in need of attention.

**It is the role of our state government to protect and manage this essential resource for the use and enjoyment of its citizens. The vision of the Alabama Water Agenda is a state government which strives to protect these invaluable resources.** This can be accomplished through good public policy administered by functioning and efficient state agencies which fully enforce the laws that protect the people of Alabama and our rivers.

Increasingly, Alabamians understand how important our waterways are and how important it is to protect them. With a state motto of "We Dare Defend Our Rights," citizens of Alabama are no strangers to standing up for our values. Whether used for drinking, swimming, boating, fishing, or aquatic habitat, we must defend our right to have clean and healthy water in Alabama today and for generations to come.







## ABOUT THE AGENDA

The Alabama Water Agenda is a guide for achieving healthy waters in Alabama. Since 2007, it has served as a resource for river protection and sustainable water policy in Alabama. It has been embraced by citizens across the state and has received the support and praise of scientists and academic experts as well as many state and federal agency personnel. Currently, grassroots citizens groups across Alabama are working to protect and restore the health of our rivers, watersheds, and wetlands. These groups represent thousands of citizens throughout the state who demand clean, healthy waters. At its core, the Alabama Water Agenda represents the collective knowledge and experiences of individuals and grassroots organizations from across the state.

## ABOUT THE UPDATE

In its first iteration, the Alabama Water Agenda helped coordinate collective action across Alabama's watersheds. In 2010, the Alabama Rivers Alliance and Southern Environmental Law Center conducted a review of the Agenda in order to ensure its currency and usefulness. As part of this review, grassroots groups were polled about their current issues and the challenges they faced in their efforts to protect their rivers. Participants were asked to assess the Agenda's usefulness and to suggest improvements.

The consensus: the Alabama Water Agenda is still a relevant tool for addressing broad problems affecting the rivers of Alabama. Moving past the identification of threats, much of the content of the previous Agenda has been retained with three significant updates.

## UPDATE: FOUR ACTION ITEMS

The original Alabama Water Agenda's greatest contribution to the protection of our rivers was its ability to speak to the underlying systemic problems that allow the more recognizable problems, such as water pollution and dried out streams, to occur. With this in mind, this update has been restructured to identify these systemic problems and to provide solutions for addressing them. For example, suburban sprawl is a factor in the larger problem of stormwater pollution, and stormwater pollution itself is a symptom of inadequate water policy and the lack of enforcement of current stormwater laws by state and local governments. Therefore, in this update of the Agenda, stormwater pollution and suburban sprawl have now been included in case studies in the discussion of water policy and enforcement. Of the six Priority Threats from the original Agenda, three were identified as addressing systemic problems: Enforcement, Agency Cooperation and Planning, and Inadequate Funding. To this list was added Water Policy, making four Action Items in the Agenda.

### **ACTION ITEMS OF THE ALABAMA WATER AGENDA**

- 1. Water Policy**
- 2. Enforcement**
- 3. Agency Coordination**
- 4. Adequate Funding**



The addition of Water Policy marks a significant improvement in the Alabama Water Agenda. Over the years, many have expressed frustration that Alabama does not have a clear, comprehensive, statewide water policy. Many of the challenges to protecting water quality, natural ecosystems, and public health are rooted in the lack of a state program for managing the use of the state's waters and for protecting and enhancing these resources in the public interest. Therefore, this updated Agenda will provide solutions for adopting and improving water policy in Alabama. Specific recommendations have been provided for implementing a scientifically sound and politically feasible water permitting regime.

## UPDATE: CASE STUDIES

In this updated Alabama Water Agenda, each Action Item includes a case study. These real-world examples explain how a systematic problem has lead to an environmental problem and how that environmental problem has affected Alabamians in the community where it occurred. These case studies highlight environmental problems that are widespread in Alabama, including industrial, urban, and agricultural pollution and unrestrained development.

## UPDATE: CLARITY AND EXPLANATION

Many of those polled expressed a concern that the Alabama Water Agenda was overly technical and hard to understand. Additionally, there were requests for real-world examples or illustrations which would aid in understanding the issues presented. In this vein, the entire Alabama Water Agenda has been rewritten with an eye toward transparency and clarity and it has been professionally repackaged to incorporate these recommendations.

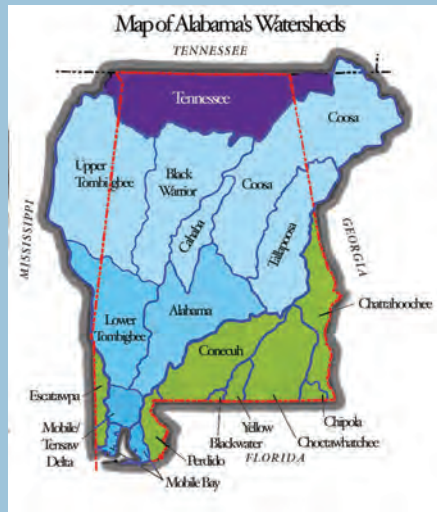
**This updated Alabama Water Agenda is now more focused as a program and more user-friendly as a publication in order to continue its work towards restoring and protecting healthy rivers for healthy people for a healthy Alabama.**



## WHAT IS HEALTHY WATER?

### WATERSHEDS

When a drop of water falls to the earth, if it remains as surface water it will follow a predetermined path that is dependent on the geography and composition of the land on which it falls. This path is known as a watershed, and all surface waters within

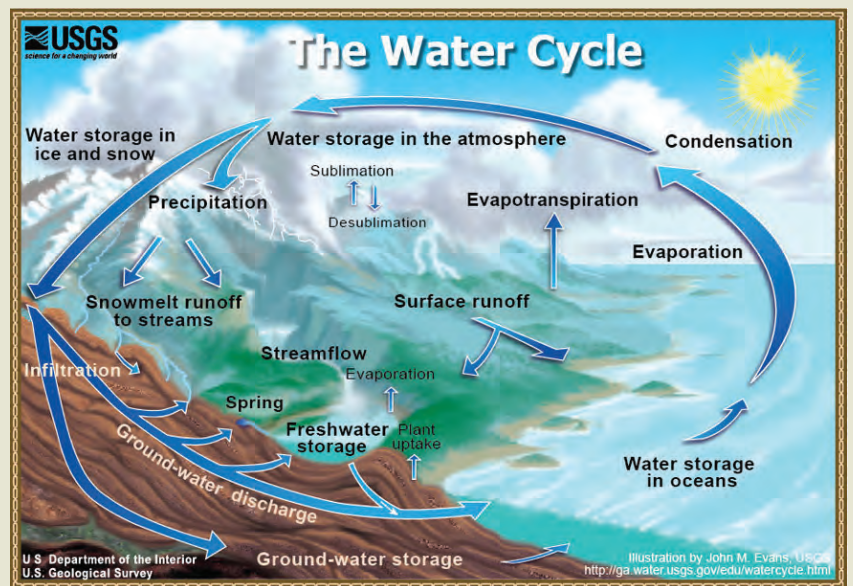


that watershed will flow to the same place unless interrupted or diverted. A watershed can be as small as a suburban backyard or as big as an entire river basin. Alabama's rivers can be divided into 18 watersheds which are identified by our largest named rivers. Over two-thirds of these connect to each other to form one massive watershed which ultimately flows into and sustains Mobile Bay and its delta. Because of this, decisions made in one area of the state can have far-reaching impacts on water health well beyond local municipal boundaries.

To say that we need healthy water is an understatement. Alabama's waters are a natural treasure. Not only do they serve as key components of our natural world and our public health, but they also provide the foundations to our economy by providing water for agriculture, industry, and transportation, as well as underpinning a multi-billion dollar recreation and tourism industry. However, in order to protect and promote these resources we must first have an understanding of how water works, where it comes from, and how we interact with it.

### THE WATER CYCLE

Our water is not new; it has been recycled and reused over millions of years. The water cycle is the continuous movement of water around the earth. This is an interconnected process that includes precipitation in the form of rain and snow, absorption into the ground, transport in the form of runoff and surface flows, and return to the atmosphere through transpiration



and evaporation. There is also a vital connection between water that is absorbed into the ground and surface water that remains in our rivers, streams, and wetlands. Surface water collects and provides the recharge for our underground aquifers. In turn, this underground water returns to the surface and provides the base flows for many of our rivers and streams, particularly during drought periods. Our impacts on either of these resources, both through pollution and consumption, have direct consequences for the system as a whole. It is therefore important to understand the water cycle in order to understand the impacts that we have on the cycle and the natural systems that are present in Alabama.

## HOW IS WATER HEALTH MEASURED?

Water health is indicated by various chemical, physical, and biological components as well as by how well the system meets the needs of the communities that depend upon it.

The concept of water health can be broken into four categories: Water Quality, Water Quantity, Public Health, and Ecosystem support. In the next several pages, the Alabama Water Agenda will evaluate four specific Action Items that will have a positive impact on each of these categories.



• **Water Quality** describes the chemical, physical, and biological attributes of water itself. Major pollutants affecting water quality in Alabama include sediment, pathogens (bacteria), metals, and nutrients. Good water quality is essential to ensuring that the system thrives ecologically and that the water is safe for human uses. Throughout Alabama, water quality is threatened by direct pollution from industry, land development, agriculture, and surface mining, as well as indirect pollution from surface runoff and air deposition.



• **Water Quantity** is the amount of water that is in a river, stream, or aquifer. The right amount of water at the right time is essential to proper functioning of the system. Ecologically, our environment has developed to rely on the natural variations of water systems. These systems depend on certain levels of flow for reproduction, migration, food, and control of invasive organisms; both high flows and low flows are important for rivers at different times of the year. Water quantity is also important to ensure that we have enough water for navigation, water supplies, and to dilute pollution. Water quantity is threatened by excessive, unregulated water withdrawals from our rivers and aquifers, interbasin transfers, excessive flooding in urban areas, and the increasing demand for water supply from local and out-of-state entities.

• **Public Health** describes the interdependence that we have with our water. When human health is at risk due to poor water conditions, we know that our water is unhealthy. Pollution (such as bacteria and toxins) and fish with high levels of mercury threaten public water supplies and recreation areas and put the public at risk (according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control). Waterborne illnesses affect thousands of citizens and tourists each year and discourage water-based recreation activities such as swimming and boating. Our water supplies need to be protected in order to ensure the health of our citizens and to reduce the cost of providing safe drinking water.

• **Healthy Ecosystems** are the best indication of overall water health. We now know that if the water quality will not support the ecological systems that depend on it, it will quickly become unsuitable for human uses unless we spend a lot of money and time treating it. A diverse and thriving aquatic community is an indication of a healthy watershed. Because of its diverse waterways, Alabama ranks fifth in the nation in plant and animal diversity, and first in freshwater species diversity. Unfortunately, Alabama also ranks fourth for number of species at risk for extinction. To protect our valuable and diverse natural ecosystems, we need to protect aquatic habitat from excessive water withdrawals, in-stream erosion, degraded water quality, sedimentation, and the loss of stream bank vegetation. Our native species need plentiful clean water to survive. Healthy fisheries and aquatic communities in Alabama in turn promote strong economies and tourism.

**Through its policies and programs, Alabama must ensure that these four categories of water health are preserved and maintained for future generations.**



## THREATS

Alabama is blessed with rich and diverse water resources. Unfortunately, these resources are under constant assault. Pollution discharges toxic chemicals and biological hazards into our waters. Runoff from urban streets and rural farmland carry oxygen-stealing nutrients and stream-choking sediments that scour streambeds and collapse banks. Wasteful water use on crops and golf courses stress an already unwieldy, unregulated water withdrawal regime that amplifies droughts. Our insatiable expansion from traditional urban centers to sprawling, unconnected suburban commuter towns is steadily erasing pristine wildlands, depriving us of the services that our water systems provide. In every part of the state, citizens are banding together to fight these travesties.



Improper water management exacerbates the effects of droughts, creating dry stream beds.



Silt and sediment choke fish and wildlife in a stream near Birmingham.



A wastewater treatment plant discharges nutrients and pathogens into a creek in central Alabama.



Mud from a construction site clogs a stream after a rainstorm.



Nutrient pollution from landscape fertilizers causes an oxygen-stealing algae bloom.



Neighborhoods with little remaining natural space are impinging further and further into our last few pristine wildlands.





Erosion collapses improperly installed silt fencing at a construction site. This mud will run off into the city sewer system, streams, and rivers.



A stream bank erodes and collapses over a deforested section of river in west Alabama.



Dams permanently alter a river's flow. The largest mass extinction in North America was caused by damming the Coosa River.



Industrial pollution discolors a river in north Alabama.



Industrial pollution clouds a creek in the Black Belt region of Alabama.



Wasteful and outdated irrigation methods stress an already unwieldy and unregulated water withdrawal system.



## ACTION ITEM 1: WATER POLICY

### CASE STUDY: DROUGHT

As the 2007 drought developed, it became apparent that Alabama was unprepared to respond to shortages in the water supply. In February 2008, the Alabama legislature created the Permanent Joint Legislative Committee on Water Policy and Management to develop a state water management plan. This action was welcome but long overdue. Eighteen years earlier in 1990, Governor Guy Hunt established the Alabama Water Resources Study Commission which concluded that “the probability of [worst case scenarios] grows with each day of inactivity with regard to planning for and managing Alabama’s water resources in a comprehensive manner.” [1] The 2007 drought was such a scenario.

Alabamians get their water from many sources. However, most of our water is shared with our neighboring states. Of the 18 watersheds in Alabama, only two (the Black Warrior River and the Cahaba River) flow completely within Alabama. The others either begin in or flow into another state. In managing our portion of these waters, Alabama is falling ever further behind. In February 2008, Georgia adopted a comprehensive statewide water management plan. Florida and Tennessee also are addressing the issue head on. Meanwhile, Alabama remains embroiled in a tri-state water war with Georgia and Florida and tensions are increasing over the use of the Tennessee River. Alabama’s lack of policy hurts our efforts to protect the waters flowing in Alabama and puts our environment and economy at risk.

Unfortunately for Alabama’s water policy, the rains returned in 2009 and the effort to adopt a comprehensive water management plan halted. The legislative committee remained inactive for years. The result of inaction is clear: the water wars continue and our rivers remain threatened from local attempts to source water resources. To echo the 1990 committee: “actions must be undertaken immediately to develop a framework for managing [Alabama’s] water resources. The longer Alabama delays...the greater the gap will become with respect to other State’s water resource and the lost opportunity for economic development.” [2]

[1] Alabama Water Resources Study Commission, Executive Study: Water for a Quality of Life, October 10, 1990, at 1-3.

[2] Id.

When Alabama was first established, water was abundant and not many people were competing for the resource. Under these historic conditions, our state adopted a traditional system of monitoring water use known as the riparian system. This system allowed each landowner to make whatever use of the water that he wanted so long as that use did not “unreasonably” interfere with the uses or interests of her downstream neighbors. Because we did not have the sophisticated understanding of water and the effects that our actions have on the natural world that we do today, we did not develop the laws and regulations required to protect water and its associated ecological communities as a public resource.

Over time, the need for strong laws and clear, enforceable regulations has become evident. Although we live in one of the most biologically diverse places on earth, we find ourselves near the top of the list for extinction of species, and increasingly we find ourselves running low on water during our typically hot and dry summers. Our waters are being increasingly polluted. These problems are a direct result of the lack of a good comprehensive policy. As we have grown, Alabama has not developed the institutions, laws and regulations necessary to protect our water systems from ourselves. Today, our state uses an unorganized patchwork of federal and state environmental laws to provide protection to our water resources. These regulations, however, are increasingly ineffective because we do not have a unified program for assessing and managing our water resources.



### HOW ALABAMA CAN TAKE ACTION

Adopt a comprehensive water management policy. To ensure long-lasting protection for our waters, the Alabama Water Agenda will focus on several key areas and work to enact proactive policy solutions through legislation and agency rulemakings. Working through the state legislature and many state agencies, new and revised statutes and regulations as well as new policy guidance can be developed to address the major threats to our waters.

#### 1. Comprehensive Water Resource Regulation and Permitting

are required in order for Alabama to protect the biological, chemical and physical integrity of our water resources in the public interest. The state must protect certain waters from allocation as well as authorize additional protections of the waters of the state. In order to do this, Alabama must



adopt, implement, and enforce a water permitting regime in which the state accounts for and authorizes all consumptive uses of state waters and institutes programs for the preservation and protection of the flows required for public health and ecosystem function.

**2. Watershed Protection** emphasizes measures to protect our water resource systems at the macro level. Watershed protection includes maintaining the sources of our waters such as the tributaries, wetlands, and aquifers, while safeguarding both terrestrial and aquatic imperiled wildlife species. Examples of this policy include enforceable regulations to protect specific resources like stream bank vegetation, sensitive habitats, wetlands and groundwater, which contribute to healthy stream flow.



### **3. Pollution Prevention Policies**

target those activities that impair or threaten our water directly and ensure that state officials have the tools they need to protect our water resources. Clear and enforceable laws and regulations to govern all pollution sources, including water treatment plants, quarries, city streets, farmlands, and construction sites, as well as non-traditional sources of pollution such as power plants that emit toxic chemicals like mercury, are important for ensuring good water quality. Improved pollution permits, effective stream restoration projects, and enforceable pollution

reduction plans can help reduce direct impacts from pollution. Included in this strategy is the recognition that it is the responsibility of the state to ensure that the state's actions are in compliance with all federal laws and that permitted discharges do not violate the water quality limitations of the receiving waters.

**4. Land Use Planning** recognizes that with increased growth comes increased responsibility to protect and preserve our water resources. Suburban sprawl and unregulated land development are some of the greatest hazards to our water resources. Specific strategies must be developed to educate and enable state and local agencies in planning, zoning, and utilizing innovative methods to accommodate economic growth in a sustainable way.

Each of these strategies involves a range of actions at various levels of local, regional, and state government, but cumulatively they are focused on building a comprehensive water management policy for Alabama.





## ACTION ITEM 2: ENFORCEMENT

### CASE STUDY: STORMWATER POLLUTION

ADEM has historically inspected only 10 to 15 percent of its active construction sites annually. The EPA has noted that at that rate, most construction sites within any city would never be inspected. [1] Citizens have become aware that this stormwater pollution from construction sites causes problems with drinking water and destroys aquatic habitat. For example, after development increased along the banks of Little Shades Creek, a tributary of the Cahaba River, in Birmingham, the fish counts downstream of the creek have been in decline. [2] Citizens have joined the volunteer-run Muddy Water Watch Program to assist ADEM in enforcing their regulations. This program teaches volunteers to document, publish, and report to ADEM sediment runoff problems in their community. One such citizen is responsible for the reduction or cessation of pollution at more than 10 sites. Go to [muddywaterwatch.org](http://muddywaterwatch.org) to find out how you also can become trained to help ADEM enforce these regulations.

[1] Thomas Spencer, EPA Criticizes ADEM over Standards, BIRMINGHAM NEWS, October 3, 2010, [http://blog.al.com/spotnews/2010/10/epa\\_criticizes\\_state\\_adem\\_over.html](http://blog.al.com/spotnews/2010/10/epa_criticizes_state_adem_over.html).

[2] E-mail from Pat O'Neil, Director of Ecosystems Investigations Program, Geological Survey of Alabama, to Sarah Stokes, Associate Attorney, Southern Environmental Law Center (April 26, 2011, 11:10 CST) (on file with author).

Our laws are meaningless without adequate enforcement. Unfortunately, enforcement of water pollution laws has been sub-standard for too long. Polluters often go unnoticed, or unpunished, unless vigilant citizens and groups fight their way through complex administrative processes and costly court battles. Fines and administrative actions are often ineffective as deterrents or are inconsistently applied.

### HOW ALABAMA CAN TAKE ACTION

Strengthen enforcement policies to act as a deterrent of violations. Develop a better method for applying fines and fees to water protection and restoration projects in the state. In addition, provide the public with better access to information about violations of environmental regulations and enforcement actions being taken.

Clear pollution prevention policies will help to make sure that violations of environmental regulations are dealt with swiftly, decisively, and in a consistent and fair manner. Where necessary, agencies must be provided with sufficient authority and funding from the legislature to ensure adequate enforcement resources.





## ACTION ITEM 3: AGENCY COORDINATION

No single state agency or authority has oversight for ensuring the health and abundance of our water resources. Instead, the task is spread out among multiple State agencies, often creating confusion, conflict, or inaction.

**The Alabama Office of Water Resources** is responsible for tracking water withdrawals, developing a drought management plan, and water negotiations with other states.

**The Alabama Department of Environmental Management** ensures water quality standards are met and issues permits to the facilities discharging into our rivers.

**The Alabama Surface Mining Commission** issues operating permits to coal mining facilities.

**The Department of Industrial Relations** oversees other types of mineral mining operations.

**The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources** is in charge of protecting native fish and wildlife.

**The Alabama Department of Public Health** issues fish consumption advisories, regulates septic systems, and protects private drinking water wells.

**The Geological Survey of Alabama** is a natural resource data gathering and research agency which explores and evaluates Alabama's water and other natural resources.

There is little policy in place to ensure water quality, water quantity, public health, and healthy ecosystems are considered thoroughly in the decision-making processes of these agencies, or that agencies are working together to ensure comprehensive protection. In addition, internal agency processes and guidelines often don't provide clear and transparent authority to ensure healthy waters.

### HOW ALABAMA CAN TAKE ACTION

Engage in agency rulemaking processes designed to make our State agencies more effective and provide for comprehensive water resource protection. Future agency regulations must include clear decision-making processes, meaningful public participation, open dialogue with the public and with other agencies, and accountability. Implement executive and legislative requirements for interagency cooperation that will ensure that government action will consider the impact on the four categories of water health. In the absence of a single agency tasked with comprehensively protecting water health, it is essential that our numerous state agencies work together.



### CASE STUDY: COAL MINES

In 2008, citizens living near the Mulberry Fork of the Black Warrior River learned that a new coal mine had been permitted in their community. This mine was to be located 800 feet from the intake for the water supply of 200,000 people. Fearing that toxic metals and other harmful materials would be released into their river, they decided to challenge the permit issued by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM). Meanwhile, the Birmingham Water Works Board challenged a separate permit issued by the Alabama Surface Mining Commission (ASMC). The response from both agencies was, "It's not my job." ADEM claimed that it was not to blame because ASMC has responsibility for making sure that the sediment ponds at the mine are maintained to limit pollution into the river. On the other hand, ASMC said that pollution control and water quality are ADEM's job. Because of the confusing way that these agencies regulate coal mines, it was difficult for the citizens and the Water Works Board to get either agency to take action. The roles and responsibilities for these agencies should be clearly spelled out, and one or the other should be responsible for protecting the river from the inevitable damage from such a mine. As it was, these citizens had no choice but to go to court for a legal remedy which will cost both the citizens and the state more than it should to make sure that drinking water is protected.



## ACTION ITEM 4: FUNDING

### CASE STUDY: PERMIT FEES

An example of what Alabama could do to increase funding is to increase fees for permits and allow penalties for violations to fund the permitting agency. Those state agencies that rely on fees from the regulated community are more likely to survive economic recessions. During the budget cuts of 2000-2002, Florida's Department of Environmental Protection, which is required to have a program fully supported by fees, indicated that it experienced no budget cuts or layoffs. West Virginia (83% fee supported) reported that through its fee program it was able to save five positions that it otherwise would have been forced to cut because of reductions in general fund monies. Other states are moving in the direction of greater reliance on fees. Oregon, for example, stated that "as general funds become increasingly scarce, [we are] relying more heavily on fees." [1] In 2006, Tennessee's NPDES permit application fees paid for 40% of its water program and Virginia's application fees funded 41% of its water program. [2] Unfortunately, fees and fines only support roughly 13% of ADEM's budget. [3] Further, while other states allow civil penalty fees to support the agency, Alabama state law does not allow the penalties that ADEM collects to fund the agency. [4] The regulated community should help to pay for the services that their pollution necessitates.

[1] Rechtschaffen, Clifford, *Enforcing the Clean Water Act in the Twenty-First Century: Harnessing the Power of the Public Spotlight*, 55 ALA. L. REV. 775, 788-789 (2004).

[2] Va. Dep't of Env'tl. Quality, *Permit Fee Program Evaluation*, (2006), <http://www.deq.state.va.us/regulations/documents/PERMIT.FEE.FY05.final.report.12.29.05.pdf>.

[3] Ala. Dep't of Finance, *Executive Budget Office*, 2011-2012 Budget, <http://budget.alabama.gov/pages/buddoc.aspx>.

[4] Code of Ala. § 22-22A-5 (1975).

Existing State programs that monitor and protect our waters are grossly and chronically underfunded. Per capita spending on environmental protection in Alabama is among the lowest in the nation. Additional staffing, equipment, educational materials, and resources are needed to properly implement our existing laws and to provide for new and expanded programs that will better protect our waters

### HOW ALABAMA CAN TAKE ACTION

Increase the appropriations provided to the state agencies responsible for our water resources. The state legislature is responsible for allocating the General Fund, a major component of many agencies' annual budget. Additionally, ensure that the government is taking advantage of available federal matching funds. Additional funding is needed for development and implementation of cleanup plans, land protection, stream restoration, and reduction of non-point source pollution. Empower our state agencies to seek alternate funding sources in order to fulfill their obligation to Alabama's citizens and the water resources on which we rely.





## ANYONE CAN TAKE ACTION!

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**P**reserving our waters for healthy people, healthy ecosystems, and a healthy Alabama is a responsibility shared by all of us. Just as our lives are impacted by the waters around us, we impact our waters in the way that we live and in the choices that we make as a society. In order to protect our waters, we must take active measures to manage our water resources in a way that balances our needs and wants with the needs of the natural world, both today and in the future. Here are some of the actions that we can take to protect our waters.

**Learn.** Be aware of your place in the watershed. Understand the water cycle and the role that we play in it. Educate yourself and others about the importance of the rivers to us and our way of life.

**Use.** Go out and enjoy our rivers, streams, and reservoirs. Swim, boat, or hike along a stream. Invite others or join a group. Help others to get out and experience the wonders of our state's waters.

**Watch.** Be an observant user of your resource. Keep an eye out for pollution or unusual changes in your waters. Join a monitoring program. Report pollution or suspicious activities to the Alabama Department of Environmental Management or to your local authorities.

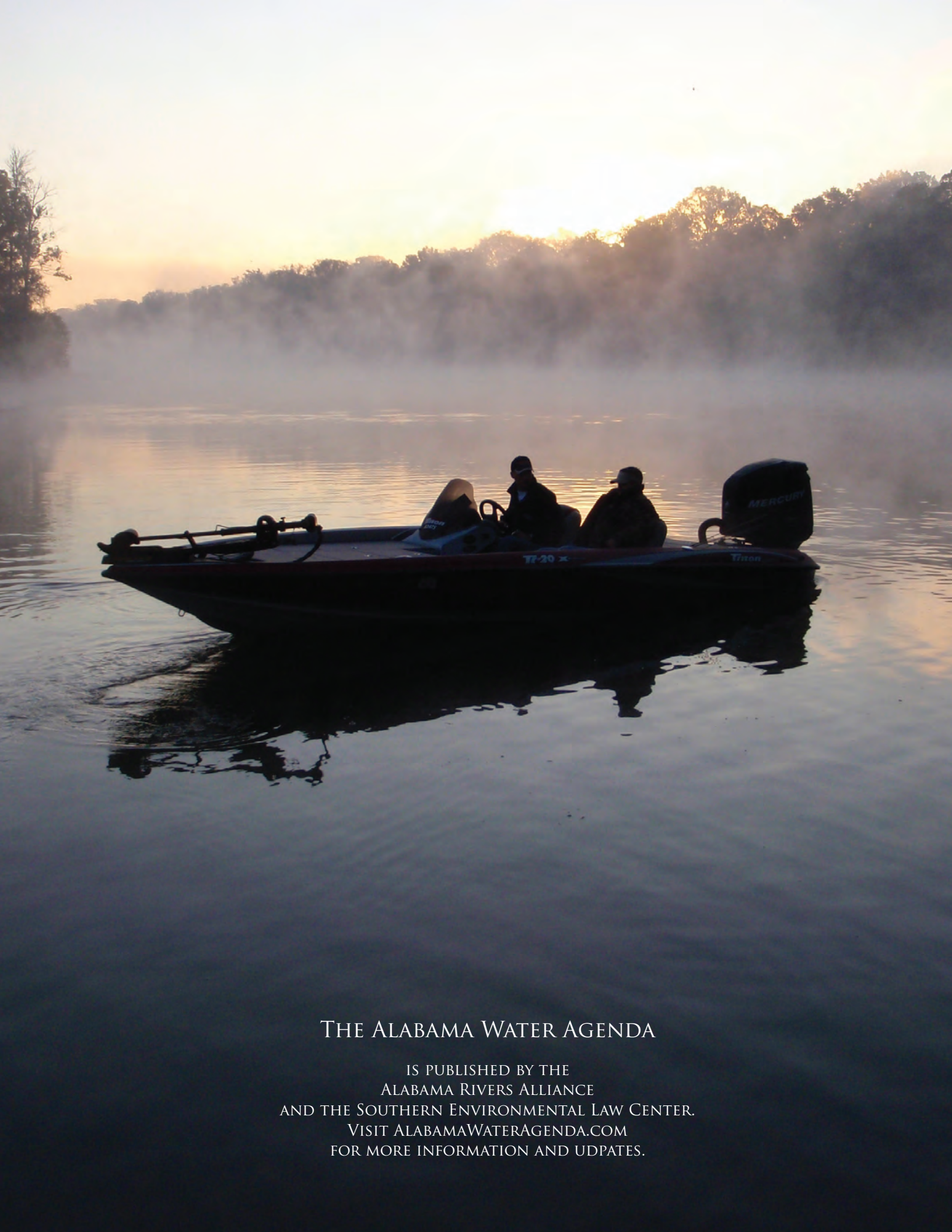
**Partner.** Find people in your community who use and appreciate our natural resources, and join forces to protect our waters. Diversify your partnership to include all those who value healthy water, even if they are outside of your normal social or professional circle. The interests of Alabama's communities often overlap. A naturalist and a boat show enthusiast will both want to see our waters protected; together, they are stronger than either could be individually.

**Advocate.** Make your voice heard. Be proud of your river heritage and let others know that protecting our waters is important to you. Educate your family, friends, and community about our waters and the impacts that we are having on them. Call your elected representatives and insist that they take a strong stand for our waters. Use this updated Alabama Water Agenda as a tool to get your message across.

**Join.** Join the Alabama Rivers Alliance and your local water protection organization and support the Southern Environmental Law Center to help us ensure that healthy waters, healthy people, and a healthy Alabama are legacies that we will pass on to future generations.







## THE ALABAMA WATER AGENDA

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