



*MISSION: BEAUTIFICATION ... CONSERVATION ... EDUCATION*

## *Planting and Nurturing*

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*Environmental Issue: Mary Lovings, Editor*

N.B. These PLANTING quarterlies are designed to provide supplemental information about material included in GCG produced courses provided by National Garden Clubs. Back issues are on the GCG website and may be of interest if you did not read them when they were first published.

### **WATER as focus for this issue:**

**Especially Oysters, the Chattahoochee, its basin; Apalachicola Bay, and its influences, The Continuing Saga Thereof**

**GREAT NEWS, SIMPLY GREAT NEWS! NOT YET THE END OF THE SEEMINGLY ENDLESS STORY. HOWEVER, SOME MAJOR STEPS FORWARD AT LAST!**

2020's Spring Session of the U.S. Supreme Court has ended! The Georgia General Assembly has completed its Covid interrupted yearly required forty days of meeting. The unending money pit case Florida has brought against Georgia over our use of waters from the Chattahoochee/Flint did not appear before the nine Justices who recently concluded their hearings until Fall.

**BETTER NEWS:** Florida's FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION has unanimously voted to and has shut down its devastated oyster harvesting beds for five years in hopes that the limited remaining oysters can thrive and reproduce to rebuild their beds and reefs and increase enough to be harvested again. In terms of conservation, more limited harvesting in the past could have helped to alleviate the oyster decline. Such a simple move is akin to the admonishment to farmers not ever to eat all their seed corn. Florida's oysters have come from Apalachicola Bay, where the four hundred and thirty-seven miles of the Chattahoochee/Flint system empty into the Gulf of Mexico and meets with Florida's Chipola River; all have areas where waters are brackish (partly salt) and where oyster reefs can be most successful.

Factors that can influence salinity include droughts as well as hurricanes, both recently frequent in Apalachicola Bay, the Atlantic Ocean, and all along the Gulf of Mexico coastline.



**Look carefully at the map at the left.**

It shows the entirety of the Chattahoochee/Flint watershed basin, along with its flow as the Apalachicola through Florida's panhandle and then into the Gulf of Mexico.

Also of relevance is that just to the right of the map is the Atlantic Ocean that provides Georgia with 100 miles of coastline. Moreover, of relevance is that part of Alabama to the left of the map which is bordered by the Gulf of Mexico. Florida as a long peninsula has the advantage of being bordered in large part by salt water. All the waters do contribute to the histories and economics of the three states.

Decreasing oysters can also be partly a result of climate change and a consequential rise in water levels. Moreover, a lack of oysters has also caused Alabama to cancel all oyster harvesting for 2020, another factor in the attempts to hold Georgia responsible for Florida's Gulf loss of oysters.

Therefore, the lack of Florida oysters assuredly cannot be entirely or primarily because of Georgia's use of Chattahoochee/Flint waters for irrigation and for manufacturing.

Moreover, and highly pertinent to this matter appearing both in print as well as in broadcast media is years of overly harvesting the oyster beds. Such statement has been made earlier this month by the Atlanta Journal/ Constitution. Pull up the NPR website and enter *Gulf Oyster Reefs* and read to find or listen to more detailed information. No wonder Florida has been highly reticent with recent information! No wonder Alabama has simply stayed out of the arguments and lawsuits! Moreover, there are major regional and national corporations that have both major financial interests and influence in both Florida and Georgia as well as in Alabama.

Some blame has been accepted and a financial settlement made to Florida by BP (British Petroleum) as a function of its major Deepwater Horizon oil spill of more than 500 million barrels of crude oil. Such oil leakage has had a negative effect on fish, shrimp and other

sea life as well as on birds and land based wildlife needing conservation. Remember the videos of seagulls and shore birds being bathed in a particular and a well known liquid soap used to rid them of oil? Oysters are among the species that can't be bathed with soap.

Despite its great length and flow, consider also that the Chattahoochee is now not navigable by barges and ships above Columbus because the rapids at Columbus are no longer restricted by dams. Their removal has provided additional recreational areas for canoe shooting through rapids. Consequently, barges of commercial materials cannot be delivered to cities along Georgia's Chattahoochee river banks.

Fifty million dollars and still counting as a minimum from Georgia's taxpayers for staff, attorneys, travel, and supplies could have planted many trees, cleaned much water, or helped to educate many children.

### SO, WHAT CAN WE AS GCG MEMBERS DO?

As always, we as individual constituents can contact our elected officials on all levels, even in an election year. Positions of those seeking to continue their elected positions should be available through their offices. For their opponents, requesting their positions on vital issues is valid. What are their plans, once they achieve the title?

**ELECTION YEAR ACTION: Above all, remember that as a 501(c)(3) not for profit organization that pays no income taxes, GCG does not and cannot take part in partisan political activity or ever, ever endorse a candidate or candidates or a specific political party. That stipulation makes it especially possible for GCG to make more scholarship funds available and is a primary part of our Mission.**

The best approach for GCG members is to make individual contact by email because copies of the messages go to the hard drives of both the senders and the recipients. Or, if we make phone contact, request an email sending of the candidate's position on the item we are calling about. Some elected statewide officials or their staff members may state that they do not have email; however, they do and such addresses are available through the Georgia General Assembly's website. It's highly important that **IF** you identify yourself as a GCG garden club member that you include the applicable Position Paper and/or specific item within a Position Paper that you are supporting. The other option is holding an open forum on a specific topic or topics and inviting both or all office seekers to participate. Given the short time before the November election, such is not recommended.

It's important to include the pertinent details when presenting an issue to be aware of the other side or even several sides of a matter. N.B.: the care and feeding of elected officials is an art all on its own.

This COVID-19 year is difficult for each and all of us in many ways, especially when our emails and text messages have increased greatly and likely include multiple pleas for contributions, matching funds or begs for *chipping in*. Polling pleas are also rampant and they do not have to be answered. Many will follow the poll with another plea for funds.

Never forget that in this country, we each and all still have secret ballots. Many groups and campaigns have the required “unsubscribe” options, but they are often at the bottom of messages in tiny fonts and sometimes require more requests for information than needed.

MOREOVER, be aware that scam messages are flowing frequently. If you are suspicious about a message, click on the title of the sender at the top of a message. If, for example, an individual name and not a specific corporate address appears, you can figure that the message that’s supposed to be coming from a reputable source is NOT that at all. DELETE IT IMMEDIATELY! DO NOT OPEN IT! Just such a message for computer virus protection just arrived here.

*PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING POSITION PAPER.  
IT OUTLINES CONCEPTS AND GUIDELINES THAT GCG COLLECTIVELY WANTS  
TO HAPPEN THROUGH THE MAGIC OF THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS.*

*Position Paper 2003:*

## ***GCG Commits to the Protection of Water as a Public Resource***

*Reviewed 2016*

*The Garden Club of Georgia, Inc. supports independent, scholarly, peer-reviewed scientific research as the basis for the formulation of responsible public policy and legislation, and appropriate funding in order to ensure qualified results.*

*The Garden Club of Georgia, Inc. maintains that the surface and ground waters of [the State of] Georgia should continue to be a public resource, subject to reasonable use by others, but protected for the common good; and should be managed in a sustainable manner by the state in order to protect the natural ecosystems and to meet both human and economic needs.*

*GCG recognizes that all life is dependent upon clean water, and we support the original objective of the 1972 Clean Water Act to "restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the nation's waters." We maintain that a "watershed-based" approach is the best way to achieve this goal.*

*Despite outstanding progress since 1972, many waters in Georgia do not meet the minimum standards for drinking, fishing, and swimming. Contamination from industry, agriculture, municipalities and households grows faster than our ability to set and enforce standards. The proliferation of excess nutrients and toxic substances pollutes our rivers, lakes and coastal waters. The loss of critical wetlands as well as nonpoint source pollution from stormwater runoff, have increased the pollution and sediment load in our waters. Fresh water resources are also a problem in Georgia. Water quantity is endangered by droughts, subsidies, diversion of water for agricultural use, and rapid commercial and residential development.*

*In order to protect our water resources, to promote water conservation and reuse, and to prevent pollution, the Garden Club of Georgia, Inc. supports the following goals:*

*1. Reduction of water pollution by:*

- *Reauthorization of a strengthened Clean Water Act*
- *Reduction of point source pollution from industry and sewage treatment plants*
- *Reduction of nonpoint source pollution from stormwater runoff*
- *Reduction of airborne pollutants which degrade water quality*
- *Enforcement of strict water quality standards and pollution permits*
- *Increased funding for public education and clean water programs*

*2. The protection of our ecosystems by:*

- *Restoration and preservation of our watersheds*
- *Protection of ground and surface waters*
- *Restoration and preservation of our wetlands*
- *Public education about natural resources protection*
- *Incentives for greenspace acquisition, to encourage riparian restoration and preservation*
- *Development of statewide policy to increase protection of coastal waters and our oceans*

*3. Ensure the statewide availability of safe drinking water and public education concerning its content.*