

**Remarks by Sam Olens
Council for Quality Growth
Friday, August 14, 2009**

The residents of metro Atlanta have always considered the Chattahoochee River to be the lifeblood of our region. Ever since Lake Lanier was built, we have sought to use the lake reasonably, treat the resource wisely and return the majority of the water for others downstream to use.

We do recognize the limits of this water resource and have made it a practice for decades to turn away big water-using industries. And since 1973, when the Metropolitan River Protection Act was enacted, a 2,000-foot buffer was created on either side of the Chattahoochee, from Buford Dam to the southern border of Fulton County, to limit development of the corridor.

There is plenty of water in this basin to meet the reasonable needs of everyone in the basin – without sacrificing the environment – if the reservoirs are properly managed and all users practice best-in-class conservation. On that score, metro Atlanta has exerted high levels of responsibility and stewardship in its use of this water resource.

The fact is we never take more than 3 percent of the available flow above the Florida line. That's reasonable, responsible use by any standard.

Since 2001, the Metro Water District has achieved what previously was unimaginable. No other region in the country brings together as many different jurisdictions and water systems to cooperatively develop and implement water management plans.

Water conservation has been priority Number One, with the Metro Water District plans scheduled to achieve a reduction in water use per capita by 20 percent by 2035.

Twenty-four water providers within the Metro Water District offer toilet rebates to residential customers. In Cobb County alone, we have processed rebates for more than 7,800 toilets and distributed more than \$525,000 in rebates to customers. Additionally, we have spent \$500,000 to retrofit urinals and toilets in government buildings.

Gwinnett County is also an outstanding water steward. The \$700-million F. Wayne Hill plant treats wastewater to almost drinking water standards before piping it to the Chattahoochee. It is recognized around the world for its advanced levels of water reclamation. What goes back into the river meets the highest standard in the business.

The City of Atlanta's water conservation efforts have also produced very impressive results. Their drinking water use is down more than 20 percent since 2000, despite a growing population. Please also recall the City's multi-billion-dollar program to upgrade its water and sewer infrastructure.

Let's be clear about the judge's ruling. Never once has he said metro Atlanta uses too much water. And never once has he said there is not enough water in the basin to meet the reasonable needs of all users.

His ruling is based on a very narrow interpretation of the law that authorized the Dam in 1946. His ruling says simply that the 1946 authorization does not allow the Corps of Engineers to operate Buford Dam for water supply.

The judge's ruling, if allowed to stand, would have devastating consequences for our region. Returning the Dam to base-line operations of the mid-1970s is unconscionable.

Three million residents in North Georgia rely on Lake Lanier and the Chattahoochee River as their sole source of drinking water. If the three million residents left our region tomorrow flows at the State line would increase on average less than 2 inches, in a river that experiences daily fluctuations of more than two feet due to hydropower operations!

We can conserve and should, but we cannot conserve our way out of Court's "draconian" directive. Additional reservoirs can help but simply cannot be permitted, let alone constructed, in the three-year timeframe set by Judge Magnuson.

Re-use and quarries must be considered and commercial/industrial water-efficient appliance rebates would assist. Desalinization is cost-prohibitive and technologically untried for a

problem of this magnitude or a region located this far away from the ocean. Regional/State projects are warranted along with other creative solutions.

We are fully supportive of the Governor's efforts to restart negotiations with the governors of Alabama and Florida. It's time that we look at our multi-state area as an economic mega-region – one that should unite to compete on the global front. We're not Bosnia and Croatia – we're all states within the United States of America. We applaud the Governor's appellate course and the appointment of Mike Garrett.

A reasonable and mutually beneficial agreement among Georgia, Alabama and Florida must be reached as soon as possible. Then, Congress should act quickly to codify the Agreement.

Metro Atlanta leaders are working with our Governor and Dr. Couch, and look forward to discussions with our neighbors, their Governors and federal elected officials. The 1946 statute may expressly limit the use of the Dam to flood control, navigation and hydropower, but common sense is plentiful. I view the Court's charge as a demand for aggressive good faith negotiations. The Court understands the numerous environmental and technological limitations of a three-year mandate. If we show the Court wise use of the three years, we will be fine.