

A TIME FOR CLARITY!

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To coin a phrase from the fashion world, “Water is the new Oil!” Although it may not reach the value of crude oil, the way we use and manage this life sustaining liquid is changing.

There has been a firestorm of rhetoric lately concerning Governor Perdue’s formation of the Water Contingency Task Force and their charge to find alternative sources of water and viable solutions for Metro Atlanta’s 280 million gallon per day shortfall that could be in play by 2012. The task force was funded only by The Georgia and Metro Atlanta Chambers of Commerce and a lot of pro bono professionals making contributions of time and resources. The task force will have completed their work upon final presentation of their report mid-December. As a result of their good work, the Governor will know his available options and their cost when he meets with Alabama and Florida delegations this week. He is hoping this study will demonstrate an active and good faith effort to our sister states. He feels that negotiated compromise is necessary to garner their support for Congressional reauthorization of Lake Lanier as a municipal water supply source.

Unfortunately, some of the discussion surrounding the low feasibility option of a 100 million gallon per day inter basin transfer from Lake Hartwell to Atlanta has deteriorated into “political partisan spin and stump speeches”. To meet this daily requirement, we are only talking about a 155 cubic feet per second (cfs) withdrawal going through a pipeline delivery system that would take years to develop. To put all of this in proper perspective, one year ago, Lake Hartwell was at 22 feet below full pool. The discharges from Hartwell Dam on a given day were as high as 4000 cfs with no end in sight....What madness! Fortunately, Colonel Kertis, SRB Commander, heard the plea from the Lake Hartwell 660 Coalition and other lake activist groups and made a controversial and “gutsy” decision. He stopped the flow out of Lake Hartwell and decreased the downstream flow from Lake Thurmond to 3100 cfs. Although he took a lot of heat from downstream stakeholders and from within the Corps, the world did not come to an end and slowly but surely our lake levels began to creep upward and our economy is recovering. Thank you Colonel! When he is reassigned this June, we will miss him.

In stark contrast, one year later on Tuesday 12/08/09, Lake Hartwell was almost 2 feet over full pool and discharges were running at 19,000 cfs from Hartwell Dam and 25,000 cfs downstream from Lake Thurmond. This comparatively small transfer amount of 155 cfs should be sustainable in periods of adequate rainfall. More importantly, (please hear this) stakeholders should keep a united front and tie any inter basin transfer (IBT) to a full lake management policy and economic incentives such as new industrial development for the region. Although it would be complicated, we could even possibly negotiate monetary payments for the transferred water. Such “trade offs” could equate to lower property taxes and expanded government services and, importantly, job creating business investment for N.E. Georgia and Upstate South Carolina and also our downstream

neighbors. LH660C has always maintained the position that a full Lake Hartwell as a reserve would be of great benefit to the entire basin whenever we face the next drought.

In conclusion, Metro Atlanta is both a regional and international hub that pumps “economic nutrients” and jobs out along its interstate arteries throughout the Southeast. We do not know how many corporations all over the world currently are considering the Atlanta area or N.E. Georgia as a place to locate. They may see our water issue as a “deal breaking” uncertainty and look elsewhere without ever getting on our radar screen. Let’s wish Governor Perdue and his negotiating team the very best success as they come to the table this week to launch negotiations for a Congressional re-authorization of use for Lake Lanier water. This option is currently the most pragmatic and cost effective solution available for Atlanta and thus the entire State of Georgia. Like it or not, we are all in this boat together!