

# News Release

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## A New State Water Plan Critical to Business and Jobs, Georgia Chamber President Says; Calls for Temporary Relief from Endangered Species Act

Georgia Chamber of Commerce President, George Israel, called today for a temporary suspension or exemption from the federal Endangered Species Act, the reason the Army Corps of Engineers claims it is required to release of billions of gallons of water from Lake Lanier to Florida every day.

"While Georgia wilts, and the state's business and industry is being required to cut water usage, water is leaving Georgia at an alarming rate," Israel said, "protecting mussels in Florida, but endangering jobs and the economy in Georgia. It makes no sense."

Israel stated that the federal Endangered Species Act is due for a long-term fix that more appropriately balances the protection of our natural systems with the needs of people. "I don't expect Congress to make any changes to this law any time soon, so I join with Gov. Sonny Perdue and the entire Georgia Congressional delegation in asking President Bush, for the sake of the people of Georgia and the business community, to grant us temporary relief from the Army Corps of Engineers' actions in continuing to justify the massive release of water from Georgia," he added.

Georgians have long suffered under strict water-use restrictions. And this week, Gov. Perdue ordered a 10 percent reduction in water use by Georgia businesses, effective November 1, hitting hard especially industry which requires large amounts of water to produce their goods and products and to generate power, and businesses that rely on water as an essential ingredient of their business model, whether beverage providers or landscapers. Gov. Perdue also designated 85 counties in a request for a federal emergency designation as drought-stricken and requested a relaxation of rules requiring an excess release of water from the state's reservoirs into the Chattahoochee river basin.

"The problems we face today, and the sacrifices Georgians have made and will continue to make, point directly to a need for a state water management plan," Israel stressed. The 2008 Georgia General Assembly will consider a plan from the state Water Council that lays the framework for a comprehensive water management and use plan. "We support the establishment of a comprehensive, statewide water plan. Our current crisis makes the need for that plan and its guiding principles for future rule making that much more urgent."

Israel also praised Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle and Speaker of the House Glenn Richardson for their comments today calling for new reservoir capacity in the state. "Storage and reserve are absolutely essential to a comprehensive, successful water plan. If ever there were an opportunity for all in government, Democrat or Republican, urban or rural, north or south, to work together, the challenges we face in water, and transportation, cry out for complete cooperation among all Georgians."

"Certainly, conservation also is a part of the solution, but only one part," Israel said, "New reservoirs and infrastructure improvements, among other things, need to be put in place." As the 2004 enabling legislation clearly stated, "the Water Council plan must balance a respect and preservation of our ecological system with support of our economy, economic development and growth."

"This is a serious, immediate crisis for all Georgians and all Georgia businesses. Jobs depend on sure, swift action by both the state and federal governments," Israel said, adding that he feared layoffs and permanent economic damage if the President, the Army Corps of Engineers and others don't make this a top priority. Some estimates show that there is only an 80-day supply of stored water left in Lake Lanier."

Israel called on Alabama and Florida to share in efforts to conserve water and participate constructively in the development of a regional plan. He noted that Georgia has enacted numerous efforts to conserve water and limit its use, but Alabama has done neither. More than 60 Georgia counties are already under Level 4 drought restrictions, which among other things, includes a complete outdoor watering ban.

"The state chamber is committed to working with elected officials to arrive at a solution, one that is fair and equitable to everyone, including consumers, business, agriculture, in fact, everyone who depends on this critical resource," Israel declared. "I applaud the work of our state leaders and our representatives in Washington."

In the meantime, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce urges Gov. Perdue, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Environmental Protection Division and others with the power and platform to make policy, to navigate these troubled waters carefully and arrive at a solution that minimizes damaging Georgia's healthy and vibrant economic environment. To do otherwise, poses a risk that no amount of rainfall can mitigate.

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