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GEORGIA EPD AND ACCG RECEIVE GRANT TO STUDY WATER QUALITY

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) and the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) will jointly launch a project to study alternatives to stream buffers, while protecting water quality. A \$70,000 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency grant was awarded to both the agency and ACCG to fund the study.

The study is expected to identify better ways to protect streams from storm water runoff, largely resulting from construction and development, Georgia's number one water pollution challenge. Computer models will be developed and used to evaluate watershed protection methods. Stream buffers are the natural areas on either side of streams that filter pollutants from storm water runoff and secure soil to control erosion, and help maintain water temperature for fish and other aquatic life.

"This study will ultimately help Georgia achieve improved water quality, reduced soil erosion and healthier conditions for wildlife," said EPD Director Carol A. Couch. "It will foster understanding of how to better manage development and the potential impact on streams."

A key to the project's success is the partnership between EPD and ACCG, EPD Director Couch added.

"One of ACCG's longstanding environmental goals has been to gather ongoing data on the quality of local streams. This project will allow local governments and the state to join forces to strengthen water quality under a variety of land use conditions," said Jerry Griffin, Executive Director of ACCG.

The study will focus on two Georgia watersheds, one in a very urban area and one in the rural mountain region, both of which face special problems controlling runoff. The Yahoola Creek watershed, a headwater tributary to the Chestatee River in Lumpkin County, was chosen because of its relatively undeveloped rural location. The second watershed the study will evaluate is the Upper Flint River watershed, which lies predominantly in Clayton County, south of metro Atlanta, a highly developed urban watershed.

The participation of Clayton and Lumpkin counties is important, since local governments must regularly address pollution runoff issues. Their involvement also ensures local insights into statewide problems. Local officials in both jurisdictions to be involved in the study believe it will help protect urban and rural streams that face special challenges in the face of development.

"Protection of stream buffers is an important part of protecting water quality in Clayton County," said Wade Brannan, General Manager of the Clayton County Water Authority. "Stream bank restoration improvements along Jesters Creek confirmed that maintaining a stable environment along natural waterways can ensure water quality in a rapidly changing urban environment."

"Lumpkin County looks forward to potential alternatives to stream buffers that are applicable where steep terrain presents development challenges that must be adequately addressed if water quality here is to remain high," agreed Steve Gooch, Lumpkin County Chairman. "We are anxious to find new ways to protect water ways, in the face of inevitable development."

EPD and ACCG will release study results through public meetings and their respective Web sites www.gaepd.org and www.accg.org.

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