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JOHN BAZEMORE/Associated Press

exposed lake bed, above, is shown at Lake Lanier in Buford, Ga. ers throughout the Southeast are turning to dust and towns are atening to ration dwindling water supplies as the region struggles an epic drought. At right, Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue, left, and nama Gov. Bob Riley are shown at a news conference in Colum-Ga., in August 2006 to discuss the ending of the water-sharing ute between the two states.

The great water divide

Severe drought exposed Alabama's and Georgia's mismanagement of water resource

By JOE COOK and APRIL HALL

n the midst of our region's worst drought on record, Georgia and Alabama's governors have engaged in a battle of finger-pointing. The heart Perdue continually leverages U.S. of the fight stems from operations of dams owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

But what our rivers and reservoirs need is a lot less fingerpointing and a lot more action on the part of our states' leaders and citizens.

As the drought has worsened, the Corps of Engineers has managed to appease neither

Georgia nor Alabama. Indeed, earlier this month, Alabama Gov. Bob Riley sent a scathing letter to the corps in response to reduced flows at

Joe Cook is executive director of the Coosa River Basin Initiative in Rome, Ga. April Hall is a watershed protection specialist with the Alabama Rivers Alliance (www.AlabamaRiversAlliance.org).

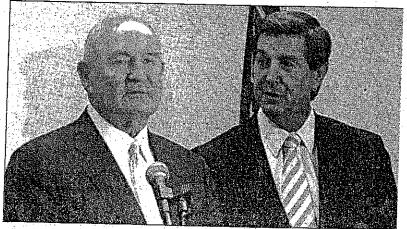
Georgia dams. He reiterated his stance last week at a press conference on the grounds of the Farley Nuclear Plant near the Alabama-Georgia border.

Meanwhile, Ğeorgia Gov. Sonn congressional delegates to intervene on his state's behalf.

In fact, Georgia is now trying to leverage the president to declare a state of emergency and thus bypass the federal Endangered Species Act and keep more water in Lake Lanier. Gov. Riley followe up with his own letter to the president warning of impacts to downstream industries and communities.

Regardless of the back-andforth of state-level political ploys it appears that a federal judge wi ultimately decide how these waters are divvied up. In September, multi-year courtordered mediation sessions aim ϵ at reaching a water sharing agreement for the Alabama-Coos.

Please see The great Page 4D



ELLIOTT MINOR/Associated Press

The great Alabama-Georgia water divide

l allapoosa river system were finally

crisis, the corps is not the only source of our brunt of the states' angst during this water water woes, as our leaders would have us While the Corps of Engineers has taken the

Alabama to wisely manage our states ailure on the part of both Georgia and A significant cause of these conflicts is a

abundant water resources. the mud flats of our mismanagement. This year's drought has merely revealed

could save almost 100 million gallons a day repairs of leaking pipes. plumbing installed in homes for sale and implementing key conservation measures tha metropolitan Atlanta region is not Georgia six years ago, the 16 county These measures include water efficient for example, despite legislation passed in

Interbasin transfers (pumping water from one river basin to another) to supply Arlanta's

million gallons a day from downstream users on the Coosa and Chattahoochee rivers. This super-sized thirst withhold more than 100 is enough water to meet the needs of at least

the Coosa by 2030. plans an increased reliance on these transfers escalation of these transfers, metro Atlanta - more than double the current amount from Instead of finding ways to prevent the

water management plan falls short at preventing these outrageous consumptive losses from the Coosa and Chattahoochee. Even Georgia's in-the-works statewide

advocates are working to include protections funding a state water plan that forces water for downstream communities.

In Alabama, water planning is even further

behind: Alabama, has made little or no effort to begin immediately developing a plan that will The plan is scheduled to be adopted by the Georgia Legislature in 2008. Georgia river

and even then with great reluctance and implemented in a handful of Alabama cities, them. Conservation measures have only been withdrawals, with no attempt to try to manage

enforceable policy in Alabama to help allocate and conserve water. Moreover, there is currently no

take two important steps: lines are ever to be peaceful, our leaders must If the troubled waters flowing across state

water efficiency. outlined in existing plans and increase its must meet conservation requirements already e Georgia, and Metro Atlanta in particular,

This can be accomplished by adopting and

draft its own water policy.

A weak drought management plan

promises only discussion and monitoring but upon clean, abundant water

Clearly, it's time for leaders in both states generations as well as the wildlife that depend Alabama should follow Georgia's lead and