



STATE OF GEORGIA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Sonny Perdue
GOVERNOR

For Immediate Release
Saturday, October 20, 2007

Contact: Office of Communications
(404) 651-7774
Kevin Chambers, EPD, 404-651-7970

Governor Perdue Declares Emergency; Requests Presidential Intervention

Governor Joined by Congressmen, Lt. Governor, State Legislators to call on President for Action

ATLANTA- Today on the banks of a withering Lake Lanier, Governor Sonny Perdue announced the designation of 85 counties in Georgia under a state of emergency due to Georgia's prolonged drought. Governor Perdue also announced that he has requested President Bush to declare a major disaster area in Georgia, asking that he utilize his power under the Endangered Species Act to exempt the state from complying with water reservoir releases that could cause catastrophic harm to those both upstream and downstream, human or otherwise. Governor Perdue was joined by Congressmen Nathan Deal and John Linder, Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle and several state legislators.

"Drought is a natural disaster, and we are experiencing the single worst drought in Georgia's history. On top of that, we are mired in a man-made disaster of federal bureaucracy," said Governor Sonny Perdue. "We need to cut through the tangle of unnecessary bureaucracy to manage our resources prudently – so that in the long-term, all species may have access to life-sustaining water."

In his letter to President Bush, Governor Perdue outlines steps that the state has taken to minimize the impact of the drought, and emphasizes the increasingly severe threat to Georgia businesses, industry, economic stability and the health and safety of Georgia citizens. He requests President Bush to temporarily exempt the state of Georgia from the Endangered Species Act to reduce the flows from Georgia reservoirs.

The 85-county emergency declaration was accomplished through an executive order signed this morning. Governor Perdue's executive order also creates an advisory panel of agencies with expertise in disaster planning to address potential emergency situations that may arise due to drought conditions. The panel, called the Drought Response Unified Command group, includes the Environmental Protection Division (EPD), Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA), the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority (GEFA) and the Division of Public Health.

Counties included in Governor Perdue's emergency declaration include Baker, Banks, Barrow, Bartow, Butts, Calhoun, Carroll, Catoosa, Chattooga, Cherokee, Clarke, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, Crawford, Crisp, Dade, Dawson, Decatur, DeKalb, Dooly, Dougherty, Douglas, Early, Elbert, Fannin, Fayette, Floyd, Forsyth, Franklin, Fulton, Gilmer, Gordon, Greene, Gwinnett, Habersham, Hall, Haralson, Harris, Hart, Heard, Henry, Jackson, Jasper, Lee, Lincoln, Lumpkin, Macon, Madison, Marion, Meriwether, Miller, Mitchell, Morgan, Murray, Muscogee, Newton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Paulding, Peach, Pickens, Pike, Polk, Rabun, Randolph, Rockdale, Schley, Seminole, Spalding, Stephens, Sumter, Talbot, Taylor, Terrell, Towns, Troup, Union, Upson, Walker, Walton, Webster, White, Whitfield and Wilkes Counties.

On Friday October 19, Governor Perdue filed a motion for preliminary injunction in the Middle District of Florida Federal Court requiring the Army Corps of Engineers to restrict water flows from Lake Lanier and Georgia's federal reservoirs.

"Georgia has reached a critical point with regard to water availability," said Congressman John Linder. "We are now put in a position where we have to choose between the health and safety of the people who live in Georgia or protecting species that will now be endangering our welfare. Today's emergency declaration at the state level and the legislation the Georgia congressional delegation introduced this week allowing states suffering from droughts to be exempt temporarily from the Endangered Species Act are good first steps in the right direction. There is much work to be done before Georgians can feel secure about their water supply. Water is not an endless resource, and we must prepare ourselves now for the future. My bill, the '21st Century Water Commission Act,' creates a commission of water experts to evaluate the water needs of the entire nation, and ensure that every American has access to adequate drinking water, even in times of severe drought. We can learn from our experience in Georgia and go to work now to stop this from ever happening again."

"I had a good conversation with Assistant Secretary Woodley this week and I am encouraged that the Corps of Engineers is finally starting to listen to the people who own the water and are suffering as a result of this drought," said Congressman Hank Johnson.

"I commend Governor Perdue for taking the necessary steps to protect our drinking water and we urge the court to consider the emergency nature of this situation and act swiftly," said Lt. Governor Casey Cagle. "Georgians can be confident that we will not stand by while our lakes are drained of water. Protecting the citizens of our state far outweighs protecting mussels and sturgeon."

"While I am disappointed the state has had to take this action and would prefer the Corps follow our recommendations on their own, I fully support taking this legal step and intend to do everything within my power to stop the needless release of excess of water from Lake Lanier," said Speaker Glenn Richardson. "Putting animals ahead of the lives and needs of Georgians is simply unacceptable."

Text of the Executive Order is below:

Whereas: Prolonged exceptional drought conditions existing across the Northern third of Georgia have created a shortage of water availability at an unprecedented level; and

Whereas: Numerous lakes, reservoirs and impoundments have experienced record breaking low water levels putting the availability of drinking water to over 4 million citizens at great risk; and

Whereas: The continued depletion of this crucial resource is creating a significant and increasingly severe threat to Georgia businesses, industry, economic stability and the health and safety of Georgia citizens; and

Whereas: These hazardous conditions require that Georgia citizens, businesses and industries be extremely vigilant in exercising aggressive water conservation methods; and

Whereas: These unprecedented events require the action of the State of Georgia to protect the public health, preserve the safety of the public, prevent major destruction to the environment and protect the social and economic stability of the State.

Now, therefore, pursuant to the authority vested in me as Governor of the State of Georgia, it is hereby

Ordered: that a State of Emergency exists in Baker, Banks, Barrow, Bartow, Butts, Calhoun, Carroll, Catoosa, Chattooga, Cherokee, Clarke, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, Crawford, Crisp, Dade, Dawson, Decatur, DeKalb, Dooly, Dougherty, Douglas, Early, Elbert, Fannin, Fayette, Floyd, Forsyth, Franklin, Fulton, Gilmer, Gordon, Greene, Gwinnett, Habersham, Hall, Haralson, Harris, Hart, Heard, Henry, Jackson, Jasper, Lee, Lincoln, Lumpkin, Macon, Madison, Marion, Meriwether, Miller, Mitchell, Morgan, Murray, Muscogee, Newton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Paulding, Peach, Pickens, Pike, Polk, Rabun, Randolph, Rockdale, Schley, Seminole, Spalding, Stephens, Sumter, Talbot, Taylor, Terrell, Towns, Troup, Union, Upson, Walker, Walton, Webster, White, Whitfield, and Wilkes Counties due to the existing exceptional drought and the subsequent threats to the water supply in these areas.

It is further

Ordered: That personnel and equipment resources of the State of Georgia be made available to assist the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Division, the Georgia Emergency Management Agency and local governments in the mitigation, preparedness and response activities currently being undertaken.

It is further

Ordered: That there is hereby created and established the Drought Response Unified Command and the Drought Response Working Group consistent with the Georgia Emergency Operations Plan. The Drought Response Unified Command will work together to coordinate a common set of incident objectives and strategies, share information, maximize the use of available resources, and enhance the efficiency of the State's drought response. The Drought Response Working Group will implement an effective and systematic means of assessing and responding to the drought emergency, under the direction of the Drought Response Unified Command.

It is further

Ordered: That the Drought Response Unified Command report to the Governor and be directed by the following individuals: The Director of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, the Director of the Georgia Emergency Management Agency, the Executive Director of the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority, and the Director of the Georgia Division of Public Health. The Unified Command shall report to the Governor through the Director of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, who will lead the Unified Command, for all command decisions regarding the State's drought response.

It is further

Ordered: That the following agencies appoint representatives to the Drought Response Working Group: Georgia Environmental Protection Division; Georgia Emergency Management Agency; Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority; Georgia Division of Public Health; Georgia Department of Agriculture; Georgia Department of Human Resources; Georgia Public Service Commission; Georgia Department of Transportation; Georgia Department of Public Safety; Department of Community Affairs, Georgia Forestry Commission; and, other State Boards, Departments, Agencies, Councils, Associations, Institutions or Authorities as necessary.

It is further

Ordered: That the Georgia Emergency Management Agency activate the Georgia Emergency Operations Plan and the Georgia Environmental Protection Division implement the State of Georgia Drought Response Strategy.

This 20th day of October, 2007.

###