

Testimony before the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment

“Comprehensive Watershed Management and Planning –
Drought Related Issues in the Southeastern US”

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10:00 a.m.
Room 2167
Rayburn House Office Building
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Testimony of:
Congressman John Lewis

I would first like to take this opportunity to thank my good friends and colleagues, Chairwoman Bernice-Johnson and Ranking Member Boozman for agreeing to hold this important hearing.

Georgia is in crisis Madam Chairwoman and I want to tell you how much I appreciate your subcommittee’s attention to this important matter. Georgia is going through a harsh drought. The lack of water has hurt the environment, hurt the local economy, and disrupted the lives of Georgia’s citizens. I will continue to work with leaders in

Atlanta, across Georgia, throughout the southeast and in Washington DC to protect our vital water supply.

Water is the most essential resource that we have.

Water is necessary to survive. If you don't have water you don't have much of anything.

What we have with today's hearing is an opportunity. An opportunity to share, on record and in the public eye, how our water is actually being distributed, why reserves in Lake Lanier continue to be depleted, and where negotiations between Alabama, Florida and Georgia went wrong. I am very disappointed that the Governors from these three states declined your invitation to appear here today and explain and discuss how after 5 months of negotiations, facilitated by the Secretary of Interior, discussions were allowed to collapse. The states play such a key role in these issues and the fact they would choose not to come here today and not to take opportunity for dialogue is upsetting.

Today we lay out, for the public to see what is really going on, and how our most precious resource is being allocated. We have called the federal agencies who manage our water here today to testify. To explain to us how our water reserves have fallen to such a dangerous level. Yet we also have invited them here to ask the questions; are the resources of your agencies being utilized by the states? Are state, local and federal agencies and officials working together to the fullest extent possible?" And finally to ask them, "what needs to change?"

One area - where change is long overdue – concerns the outdated water control manuals which govern the water released from Georgia's key reservoirs. These manuals are not meeting the needs of Georgia's citizens. It is unacceptable that such important plans are over 40 years old. Finally, after all these years, the Army Corps has begun the

process of updating these important manuals for both the ACF and ACT river basins.

However, this process will take at least three years to complete. Unfortunately, allowing for another three years of mismanagement. This three year timetable does not take into account the politically motivated, obstructionist language, in the Energy and Water appropriations bill, that prohibits the updated manuals from being implemented. The time is now. We cannot afford to wait any longer. We need these changes.

It is clear that our water policy is fundamentally flawed. Our water policy is reactive. Water is too precious a resource not to have long-term plan. Water management issues must be agreed upon before we face the type of crisis we are in today. The implementation of the new manuals by the Army Corps is a key component, but not enough. This will only change how Army Corps manages their projects.

Madame Chairwoman, we need to take a step back. We need to see our water issues in the larger picture. We need a comprehensive watershed management study of the entire southeastern United States. The current piecemeal approach to watershed management does not work. I plan to introduce legislation today that would direct the Army Corps of Engineers to develop recommendations to address current and future water needs in the southeastern United States.

It is important to look at the water demands of Georgia, of Florida, of Alabama, as individual states and from the perspectives of the individual stakeholders. But this narrow-minded perspective it is not enough. Water transcends state borders and political boundaries.

We need to stop trying to find winners and losers and do what is right and what is necessary to work together. I hope this hearing serves as a new

beginning in open and productive negotiations that bring everyone together to meet the long-term water needs of the entire southeastern United States.

I would like to close by saying: we all need to drink clean water, breathe fresh air, and eat safe food. These things are all necessary for us to live, and I believe that access to these vital components of human life is a sacred right that should not be violated.

Thank you.

