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## **Plant Ben Hill: Another Coal-fired Plant Proposed for Georgia** *Power4Georgians Targets Rural Georgia Again for Dirty Coal Plant*

Waynesville, Ga. — A private consortium of electric cooperatives, Power4Georgians (P4G), intends to develop a second 850-megawatt coal-fired plant in Georgia, in addition to Plant Washington, north of Sandersville in middle Georgia. Its second plant would be near Fitzgerald in south-central Ben Hill County. Located on the Ocmulgee River, proposed Plant Ben Hill’s coal-burning technology would require enormous water resources in the production of electricity and would emit dangerous pollutants affecting the immediate area as well as downstream and upwind communities.

Power4Georgians, LLC, is composed of five electric membership corporations (EMCs). They are: Cobb EMC (Cobb County and surrounding area); Central Georgia EMC (south metro Atlanta, north Macon area); Snapping Shoals EMC (southeast Atlanta metro area); Upson EMC (six counties in west central Georgia); and Washington EMC (Sandersville area, Washington County).

While these plans have been kept quiet and the public is just learning about them, the proposal to create Plant Ben Hill is active, according to Dean Alford, president of Allied Energy Services (AES) and spokesman for Power4Georgians. Alford recently met with members of the Fall-line Alliance for a Clean Environment (FACE) and noted that he was developing Plant Ben Hill as well as Plant Washington. Conservative cost estimates for construction of both proposed coal-burning plants are **more than \$4.6 billion – more than \$13,800 in debt for each of the 333,133 EMC members** in the Power4Georgians consortium.

Organizations across Georgia are also troubled by the damaging pollution the proposed coal-fired Ben Hill plant would have on air quality, rivers and watersheds, farms, and health.

“If proposed Plant Ben Hill is anything like its cousin in middle Georgia, Plant Washington, we can expect **more than a hundred pounds of mercury** to enter our air every year from this plant,” said **Deborah Sheppard, executive director of Altamaha Riverkeeper**. “Much of this mercury would further contaminate the fish and our families in the Altamaha River basin.”

But the effects would be widespread. “Large-scale coal combustion at the headwaters of the Satilla River would create mercury pollution which would be deposited throughout the Satilla watershed,” said **John Carswell**, acting executive director of **Satilla Riverkeeper**. “If they build a coal-fired plant in Ben Hill County, I don’t know if folks around here will be able to eat anything out of the Satilla. Our river has fed families for generations. We don’t want to lose our river.”

Two world-record fish have been caught within 40 miles of the proposed Plant Ben Hill site: the record largemouth bass out of Montgomery Lake off the Ocmulgee River, and the record chain pickerel (jackfish) out of Guest Millpond.

**Gordon Rogers, executive director of the Flint Riverkeeper**, noted: “Georgians now realize that **water is not a resource we can squander**. Waste at the faucet or wasting clean water by polluting it threatens our businesses, our families and our culture. We rely on our rivers for commerce and recreation. Most of the mercury from a coal-fired facility falls within 60 miles of the smokestack. The Flint watershed is less than 25 miles from the proposed plant site. With the Flint already heavily contaminated by mercury, a new source is unacceptable.”

Georgia’s tea-colored blackwater swamps, creeks and rivers, due to their low pH and other unique water quality characteristics, convert inorganic mercury that is spewed from coal plant smokestacks into methylmercury. Methylmercury is the form of mercury which enters the food web through bacteria and fungi and becomes concentrated in fish. **Fish that humans eat have mercury levels that are hundreds of thousands to millions of times higher than the mercury levels in the water** in which those fish swim. Methylmercury is a potent neurotoxin that interferes with the development of brain cells.

In addition, **Chandra Brown, executive director of Ogeechee Riverkeeper** observed: “**Coal ash problems come with coal plants**. Coal ash contains arsenic, lead, mercury and selenium that have to be disposed of somewhere. Mercury is especially dangerous to children, pregnant women and nursing mothers.” This week, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that it is so concerned about coal ash that it intends to declare coal ash waste to be “hazardous waste.”

The **economics of coal** are increasingly problematic. According to **Mary Carr Bendeck of the regional Southern Alliance for Clean Energy**, “As a national security matter, it makes a lot more sense to invest in local clean-energy jobs such as weatherization retrofits and energy efficiency. The price of coal plants continues to increase while the cost of clean energy alternatives is decreasing. There are lots of **good, clean-energy options that would do more to help Georgia’s economy and keep us secure.**”

Moreover, the demand for energy among EMCs is dropping. “Where are the numbers to even show that Plant Ben Hill is needed? It sounds to me like Ben Hill is being proposed in the event that Power4Georgians is unable to move forward with Plant Washington,” said **Katherine Cummings, president of FACE**. “**I haven’t seen data that show that even one of these plants is needed** given that more people are energy efficient with Energy Star appliances, home insulation, and conservation.”

“While the rest of the world moves forward, Georgia should not take giant steps backward,” said **Midge Sweet, director of Georgians for Smart Energy Coalition**. “Economic and environmental concerns have prompted **utilities and regulators across the country to reject coal-burning power plants** and redirect investments to energy efficiency and renewable sources of energy. It’s time for Georgia to become a national leader in economic development based on clean-energy alternatives.”



**Altamaha Riverkeeper** works to protect and restore the habitat, water quality and flow of the mighty Altamaha from its headwaters in the Oconee, Ocmulgee and Ohoopsee to its terminus at the Atlantic Ocean. **Deborah Sheppard** is Executive Director Altamaha Riverkeeper: **912-437-8164**; [.altamahariverkeeper.org](http://altamahariverkeeper.org)

**Fall-line Alliance for a Clean Environment (FACE)** is composed of a cross-section of citizens opposed to Plant Washington. **Katherine Cummings**, chair, may be reached at **478-232-8822**; [.facenvironment.org](http://facenvironment.org)

**Flint Riverkeeper** is dedicated to the restoration of Georgia's most hydrologically and biologically most diverse river system. Riverkeeper **Gordon Rogers** may be reached at **912-233-6761**; [.flintriverkeeper.org](http://flintriverkeeper.org)

**Ogeechee Riverkeeper** is a citizen-based organization dedicated to ensuring clean water in the Ogeechee, Canoochee and coastal rivers. **Chandra Brown**, riverkeeper and executive director, may be reached at **866-942-6222, ext. 1**; [.ocrk.org](http://ocrk.org)

**Satilla Riverkeeper** represents people from the communities along the Satilla from its headwaters in Ben Hill County to the mouth of the river between Jekyll and Cumberland islands. **John Carswell**, Acting Executive Director, may be reached at **912-258-3678**; [.satillariverkeeper.org](http://satillariverkeeper.org)

**Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE)** promotes responsible energy choices that create global warming solutions and ensure clean, safe and healthy communities throughout the Southeast. Contact **Mary Carr Bendeck**, Renewable Energy Coordinator: **404-373-5832 x3**; [.cleanenergy.org](http://cleanenergy.org)

**Georgians for Smart Energy (GSE)** is a coalition of energy, environmental and public interest organizations from across Georgia. **Midge Sweet**, director of the GSE coalition, may be reached at (404) 667-4476 or (404) 688-5430 [.georgiansforsmartenergy.org](http://georgiansforsmartenergy.org).

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