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## **OGEECHEE RIVERKEEPER FILES APPEAL ON WELL PERMITS**

*EPD did not consider the 'unreasonable adverse effects,' appeal contends*

Ogeechee Riverkeeper (ORK) has filed an administrative appeal to Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) regarding groundwater withdrawal permits for Bryan and Bulloch Counties, intended to supply the Hyundai Megasite and other users. ORK asserts that the EPD's conclusions regarding these permits are incorrect, particularly regarding the impact on the Floridan Aquifer, the effectiveness of protective measures, and consideration of 'unreasonable adverse effects.' The appeal will require an administrative hearing.

The appeal maintains ORK's position that Floridan aquifer groundwater should be used for people, animals, and crops – not industry. It is not in the public interest to prioritize large scale industry over living beings, yet in early 2025, public utilities in the area will have to reduce their withdrawal of pristine groundwater water for drinking and human use. Even with this deadline on the horizon, EPD is approving a permit for massive industrial withdrawals. This groundwater is too precious to be used for industrial processes.

This appeal will show that these issued permits do not protect water resources for citizens and are in direct contradiction to the general welfare and public interest. With all of the potential impacts – acknowledged by the need for a well mitigation fund – and the enormous public concern, EPD still chose to issue groundwater permits with loose margins. The issued permit gives 25 years for the users to find an alternative source of water. ORK maintains a quarter of a century is too long, especially when water usage and aquifer impacts are already being felt. EPD also chose to give an unnecessarily long permit length – 10 years – before a renewal is required, but provided no reasoning why the permits deserve that length of time.

EPD has a mandate to not issue permits that would cause 'unreasonable adverse effects;' however ORK doesn't agree with EPD's standard of up to a 30-foot water drop as 'reasonable.' Additionally, EPD does not explain why that level is acceptable in the coastal region. Furthermore, EPD notes that it is likely the Savannah area will experience a further drop of 1-3 feet, and the Hilton Head area will experience a further drop of up to 6 inches in their cones of depression, exacerbating the ongoing issue of aquifer protection and saltwater intrusion. Yet, by issuing these permits, EPD considers this stated scenario to be 'reasonable.'

The public interest and general welfare will be further harmed by EPD's deprioritization of restoring Floridan Aquifer-surface water connections in favor of industrial use. Before the creation and persistence of the area's cone of depression, aquifer pressure fed artesian wells, springs, and other surface water connections. Those naturally occurring connections have been lost due to industrial overutilization of groundwater. Reduction of withdrawals would reconnect these aquatic resources, restoring critical

habitat for threatened, endangered, and other constrained species, and improving water quality. The decision to grant these permits is a step in the opposite direction.

Finally, ORK argues that EPD did not conduct a critical evaluation of the volume of water that was requested in these permits. The upper limit of 6.625 million gallons of aquifer water per day (MGD) requires a close analysis of the specific proposed usage. The Megasite alone is listed as a user of approximately 4 MGD but was not required to provide any estimate or justification of need. While every other entity reports its expected 'unit loading,' i.e. its rate of water usage for each type of water user, the Megasite section simply states "N/A." In a groundwater-constrained region, EPD approved these permits without the ability to critically review the requested need or make any necessary reductions in permitted amounts.

The appeal shows that EPD issued these permits without proper consideration of 'unreasonable adverse effects' and made decisions contrary to the public welfare.

**About Ogeechee Riverkeeper:** *Ogeechee Riverkeeper 501(c)(3) works to protect, preserve, and improve the water quality of the Ogeechee River basin, which includes all of the streams flowing out to Ossabaw Sound and St. Catherine's Sound. The Canoochee River is about 108 miles long and the Ogeechee River itself is approximately 245 miles long. The Ogeechee River system drains more than 5,500 square miles across 21 counties in Georgia. More at [ogeecheeriverkeeper.org](http://ogeecheeriverkeeper.org).*

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