



GEORGIA WILDLIFE
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Letter to the Editor

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Public Access to Public Assets: Georgia's Fish Belong to All of Us

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Georgia is blessed with tremendous beauty and tremendous opportunity to enjoy the outdoors. We have mountains and valleys, coastal plain and breathtaking marshlands. We have lazy, slow-moving blackwater rivers and cataracts of cold mountain streams.

Georgia has also been blessed with leaders that recognize not just the beauty of the place, but the rights of our people to enjoy those places. Our leaders and our citizens have even enshrined in Georgia's Constitution the right to hunt and fish.

However, in recent years a growing number of landowners and those leasing 'fishing rights' from them are seeking to limit the public's access to our rivers and streams as anglers. "No Fishing" signs have popped up all over Georgia next to our free-flowing rivers, whose populations of fish have been managed and protected by dedicated public servants. Those dedicated public servants' salaries and resources are paid by those that hunt and fish, not by those that own land. Our access to these rivers is via boat ramps that are more often than not paid for by hunters and anglers.

In recent days we have seen such "No Fishing" signs posted along iconic Yellow Jacket Shoals on the Flint River. The upper Flint is the world's most important fishery for shoal bass, Georgia's Official Native Riverine Sport Fish. This designation by our legislature and Governor was advanced by non-governmental organizations specifically to promote and publicize the shoal bass fishery for all Georgians and for all economic purposes associated with the fishery . . . casual anglers, serious anglers, fishing guides, and private property owners. Everyone. Yellow Jacket Shoals on the Flint is not the only place such exclusion has been attempted and even enforced. Other locations on the Flint, the Soque, the Toccoa, and in the Satilla watershed have seen such activity in recent years.

So, the Flint is not the first river in Georgia to face the exclusion of the public from access and fishing; but it is likely the largest and most visible. And we think it is time for it to be the last, it is time to reclaim lost waters elsewhere. The Flint and our others rivers have been fished for generations of people of all ages, races, sexes, income levels, and walks of life. And all of our rivers' waters are 'untitled', owned by no one, as are the fish, both held in trust by the state for all Georgians.

Today we stand up and say our rivers belong to all of us, not just those that border them. Our fish belong to all of us, not just those that own the land next to them. We all have a constitutional right to hunt and fish, not just those that own land. We are America, not the Europe of landed gentry from 200 years ago. We demand the protection of the rights of all Georgians to enjoy the bounty and the beauty of this great state.



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