

Anna Woodmansee
EAS 3110
2-18-2015

The Politics of Water

Allocation of water resources is naturally a political issue. Water is one of the most important resources in a society, with uses spanning from power to infrastructure to agriculture and livestock. With high demands and a finite number of water sources, usage and infrastructure must be regulated to preserve controls on water quality and availability. Designing and executing these regulations is a political issue, both in the sense of policymaking and in the communications between water users. Changing sewage outputs, for instance, can affect the operations of a nearby power plant and alter oxygen levels in water downstream. Decision makers must then work with all parties involved, and take into account not only environmental, but also economic, social, and political implications of any action. Water usage data and statistics have a history of being manipulated to support different points, further complicating the issue. Water affects everyone, so this is no small undertaking.

Water's value as a resource makes it a source of contention among entities sharing a water source. For example, Florida, Georgia, and Alabama are currently in the midst of a "water war," involving legislation to regulate the amount of water flowing to Alabama and Florida from sources in Georgia. Alabama uses this water primarily to produce power, while Florida is concerned about downstream salinity levels for the shellfish industry. Especially in seasons of drought, the amount of water drawn within Georgia, and especially Atlanta, directly affects water flowing into Alabama and Florida. As the issue stands, Florida has been granted permission to file a lawsuit against Georgia, asking for "equitable apportionment" of the waters of the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint basin. This request asks for a reduction of Georgia's use to 1992 levels. Georgia has responded to Florida, but no final solution has been reached.