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## Water War

### CURRENT EVENTS

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## Water War

### Drought Leaves Too Little Water to Share

Something is missing from Georgia's Lake Lanier. Its green islands, once at lake level, now sit 15 feet above the water on huge mounds of dirt. Billions of gallons of water that once filled the lake are gone.

[\(See picture, "Drought in Lake Lanier, Georgia."\)](#)

The problem runs far deeper than it looks on the surface. People and animals in three states--Georgia, Alabama, and Florida--rely on that water for their survival.

Millions of people in the Atlanta area get their tap water from Lake Lanier. Coca-Cola and Pepsi plants need the water to make soft drinks and Gatorade. Downstream, other cities, power plants, and endangered creatures rely on the water as well.

#### Praying for Rain

Normally, water isn't a problem here, but the southeastern United States is in the midst of one of its worst droughts on record. The National Weather Service says the area needs at least a foot of rain to ease the drought, and it doesn't expect to see that much rainfall any time soon.

The hot, dry weather has been causing problems all across the Southeast. In Orme, Tenn., the town's spring is running so low that Mayor Tony Reames has to have water trucked in. Families in Orme get just three hours of water each night now to take showers and wash clothes. "I've heard some threaten to move out, but where are they going to go? The drought is everywhere," Reames says.

Farmers are suffering too. The drought wiped out hay crops and dried up pastures where cattle graze. People in Alabama have another worry: electricity. One power plant shut down because there wasn't enough water to run its cooling system. Another major power plant relies on water flowing out of Lake Lanier.

#### War Among the States



**Drought in Lake Lanier,  
Georgia**

Lake Lanier has lost so much water that boathouses built out over the lake are now beached. (Credit: (c) Robin Nelson/ZUMA Press)

Lake Lanier has become a battlefield. The federal government created the lake when it built a dam on the Chattahoochee River in the 1950s. Today, the Army Corps of Engineers controls how much water stays in the lake and how much is let out so the river can continue flowing through Georgia and down the Alabama line.

After the water leaves Lake Lanier, several cities south of Atlanta tap it for drinking water and to run factories. Last--and some would argue least--are the mussels in Florida. Federal rules that protect endangered species say enough water must flow out of Lake Lanier to keep some endangered mussels, a type of shellfish, alive.

The Corps has been releasing Lake Lanier's water to comply with those rules. But because of the drought, more water has left the lake than has flowed into it. That has Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue angry. If something doesn't change, he says, Atlanta could be without water in as little as three months.

If Atlanta goes dry, it will be a human and economic disaster, Perdue says. The governor sees it as a war of "man versus mussel," and he says the federal government is rooting for the shellfish. Perdue declared a state of emergency in October because of the drought. His state is now suing to keep water from leaving Lake Lanier.

The governors of Alabama and Florida say the water is just as crucial to their people--they need it to run factories and keep fisheries healthy.

"If the water is not released, then the industries will be forced to shut down, and thousands of...families will lose their source of income," Alabama Gov. Bob Riley wrote in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

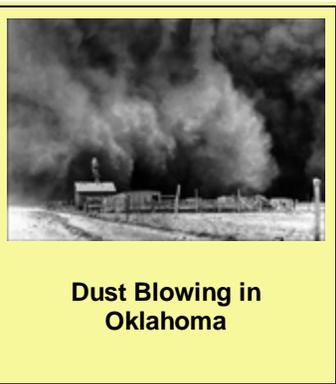
Florida Gov. Charlie Crist says Georgia recklessly let Atlanta grow too big too fast without considering the consequences, such as water shortages.

The federal government is trying to find a solution. Meanwhile, people across the Southeast are cutting back on their water use. "You just don't know what's going to happen when you go messing with the ecosystem," Reames says. "You can count on one thing: It's going to tell on you."

## Predict the News

How would you solve the Southeast's water problems?

## Time Trip



About to be engulfed in a gigantic dust cloud is a peaceful little ranch in Boise City, Oklahoma where the top soil is being dried and blown away. This photo was taken on April 15, 1935. (Credit: AP Photo)

### The Dust Bowl

The 1930s showed the nation how much damage a drought can do. When rain stopped falling in the Midwest, farm fields began to dry up. Corn wouldn't grow, and wheat struggled to sprout in a region long known as "the nation's breadbasket." After years of poor land management, fierce windstorms easily stripped the parched fields of their topsoil, blowing it into giant clouds of dust. Those storms led to the nickname the "Dust Bowl."

[\(See picture, "Dust Blowing in Oklahoma."\)](#)

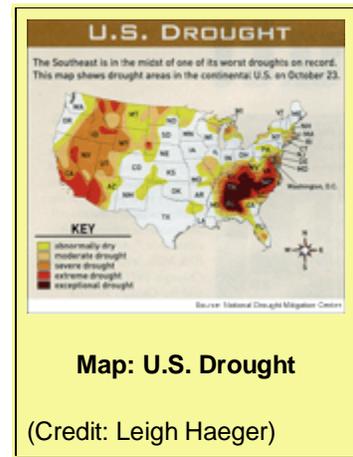
LeRoy Hankel started farming in the 1930s. "Boy, we had dust here. You couldn't keep a house clean or anything....That's the way '34 [was]," he recalls in a taped interview, one of several about the era at [www.livinghistoryfarm.org](http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org). Other farmers went bankrupt and moved west, looking for work, but Hankel stayed. "Every year we was hoping this would be the good year," he says. He didn't get a good corn crop until 1941. That drought was the nation's worst, and it hit during the Great Depression. President Franklin D. Roosevelt created new programs to help farms survive. He also started conservation efforts to bring the "breadbasket" back to life.

## Analyze the Map: U.S. Drought

Study the U.S. drought map. Then circle the correct answer.

[\(See picture, "Map: U.S. Drought."\)](#)

1. Which state has the worst drought conditions?
  - A. Alabama
  - B. California
  - C. Texas
2. Which region of the country has the fewest areas of drought?
  - A. West
  - B. Midwest
  - C. Southeast
3. Which state is untouched by drought?
  - A. Arizona
  - B. Iowa
  - C. Virginia
4. Which phrase describes Kentucky's conditions?
  - A. moderate to exceptional drought
  - B. abnormally dry statewide
  - C. drought-free



## Get Talking

Ask students: What is a drought? How might a drought effect people and businesses?

## Background

- Droughts are caused by a lack of rain over an extended period. They are a **natural** part of the climate in most countries, though the level of dryness or lack of rain that defines drought conditions varies from region to region.

- Typically, droughts are classified by four levels of severity. During a moderate drought, water shortages can develop and crops don't grow as robustly. In a severe drought, crop damage and water shortages are likely; experts recommend restricting water use to conserve water. In an extreme drought, crop damage and water shortages are widespread. A large part of the Southeast is at the most damaging level: exceptional drought, which can wipe out crops and create water emergencies. Check the drought monitor and learn more at [www.drought.unl.edu](http://www.drought.unl.edu).

- Government forecasters say the drought in the Southeast started in early 2006 in Georgia and Alabama. High temperatures and a lack of rain are a large part of the problem. A weather effect known as La Nina has exacerbated the dry conditions. During La Nina, water in the eastern Pacific Ocean near the equator is colder than normal. That affects rainfall and tends to lead to drier and warmer weather across the southern United States. For more information about La Nina, go to [www.elnino.noaa.gov/lanina.html](http://www.elnino.noaa.gov/lanina.html).

## Doing More

Have students research water-conservation techniques. Discuss what types of water conservation might work in your community. To find state **resources** and other water information, go to [www.wateruseitwisely.com](http://www.wateruseitwisely.com).

## Words in the News

**Army Corps of Engineers.** The Army Corps of Engineers dates back to 1802, when the U.S. Congress authorized President Thomas Jefferson to create a military academy at West Point, N.Y. The Corps of Engineers is a branch of the U.S. Army that works on military and civil engineering projects. The Corps plans and manages navigational and flood control systems, such as harbors, dams, and levees. The Corps also manages and works to restore wetlands.

**Great Depression.** The Great Depression occurred during the 1930s when a worldwide economic slump caused high rates of unemployment. Millions of people were without jobs or money because banks, stores, and factories closed. The stock market crash of 1929, when stock prices fell sharply, triggered the Depression in the United States. The impact spread to other countries as spending in the United States decreased. In 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected U.S. president. He launched a number of programs, collectively known as the New Deal, that created jobs and offered assistance to the nation's poor.

## Analyze the Map: One River, Lots of Demand

This map shows major water users along the Chattahoochee River in Georgia and Alabama and along the Apalachicola River in Florida. Study the map, and then answer the questions.

[\(See picture, "Map: Rivers in Southeastern U.S."\)](#)

1. Which city has the most power plants in its area that rely on the Chattahoochee River?

- A. La Grange
- B. Atlanta
- C. Columbus

2. In which state does the Chattahoochee River begin?

- A. Georgia
- B. Alabama
- C. Florida

3. How many city and county water systems does the map show along the Chattahoochee River?

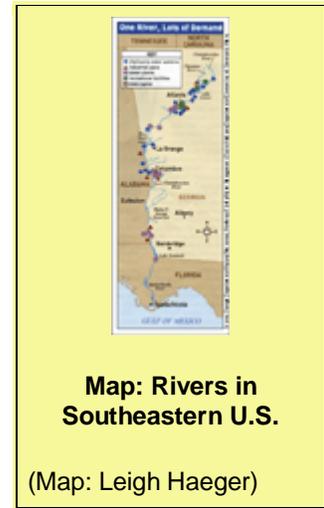
- A. five
- B. 11
- C. 17

4. Which state on the map has the fewest industrial users along the river?

- A. Georgia
- B. Alabama
- C. Florida

5. What conclusion can you draw from this map?

- A. The Chattahoochee River is essential to many areas.
- B. The Chattahoochee River isn't a major contributor to power in the region.
- C. Alabama uses the most water from the Chattahoochee River.



## Comprehension

Read this issue's cover story, "Water War," and then answer the following questions.

1. How many people get their tap water from Lake Lanier?

- A. billions of people
- B. millions of people
- C. thousands of People

2. What does the author mean in the seventh paragraph by the lake becoming a "battlefield"?

- A. Soldiers are fighting on the lake's islands.
- B. States are fighting over the lake's water.
- C. Fish are fighting each other for food.

3. Which of the following is not a cause of the drought in the Southeast?

- A. lack of rain
- B. hot weather
- C. overfishing along the river

4. Which statement is a fact?

- A. The federal government cares more about endangered mussels than people.
- B. Georgia was reckless with population expansion in Atlanta.
- C. Alabama needs water from the Chattahoochee River to run power plants.

5. Why might officials in Georgia, Alabama, and Florida all want to preserve their claims on the river?

- A. Controlling the river gives the states more political power.
- B. The river is a major source of transportation for the region.
- C. Industries and private citizens rely on the river for water.

## Answer Key

### Analyze the Map: U.S. Drought

1. A, 2. B, 3. B, 4. A

### Analyze the Map: One River, Lots of Demand

1. C, 2. A, 3. C, 4. C, 5. A

### Comprehension

1. B, 2. B, 3. C, 4. C, 5. C