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Floridians Decry Georgia Moves to Block Tri-State Water Solution

Florida officials call out Georgia Congressional delegation for once again obstructing progress on efforts to save the Apalachicola River and Bay.

APALACHICOLA, FL – Jan. 6, 2017 – Floridians working for a solution to the state's decades-long water dispute with Georgia

are dismayed by Georgia's recent move to block a bipartisan weather bill in Congress.

As the Washington Post reported on Dec. 12, 2016, "the Weather Research and Forecasting Act of 2015 — which had Democrat, Republican, bicameral and weather enterprise support — passed the Senate by unanimous consent on Dec. 2 but was left withering on the vine in the House, ostensibly because of a decades-old water dispute in the South."

That dispute, known in Florida, Georgia and Alabama as the water wars, is now before the U.S. Supreme Court. Florida sued Georgia for using too much water from the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin, endangering Florida's Apalachicola Bay. A decision by Ralph Lancaster, the special master who heard the case last fall, is pending – and Lancaster has said he will seek a regional solution for the dispute.

But meanwhile, Georgia's move killed the much-praised weather bill over an amendment by Florida Senator Bill Nelson, D-FL, which would have authorized funds for a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Water Center. Nelson wanted more scientific evidence brought to bear on the water wars.

"The Georgia delegation saw this as a threat to them damming up the Chattahoochee and using as much water as they want," Nelson told reporters, according to Politico Florida. "Which is why the Alabama delegation and Florida delegations are joined at the hip in order to try to get the natural flow — more of the water flowing south — for the use of Alabama as well as Florida, and particularly the Apalachicola Bay."

Georgia's senators backed the bill – with Nelson's amendment – when it passed the upper chamber early last month. But the following week, Georgia's House members opposed the National Water Center over its intended role in facilitating collaboration across water management agencies – and the consequences for the water dispute.

"It was again another example of Georgia being unwilling to even work with Florida in any way to try to resolve this three-decade-long water issue between Florida and Georgia," former Florida Congresswoman Gwen Graham, D-Tallahassee, told Politico.

"The Georgia delegation is afraid of science, plain and simple," said Apalachicola Riverkeeper Dan Tonsmeire.

“They’re willing to sacrifice a bill of nationwide importance rather than face the ugly truth about the damage their water use is causing to the Apalachicola River and Bay. Make no mistake, they are sacrificing a natural, national treasure for their own, narrow political interests. We can only hope that their constituents see through this ruse and hold them accountable for the mess they’re making downstream.”

Tonsmeire said the Supreme Court’s pending decision in Florida v. Georgia will affect not just the combatant states but the entire country.

