

INTRODUCTION

The House Study Committee on Fishing Access to Freshwater Resources was created by the passage of House Resolution 519 during the 2023 Session of the Georgia General Assembly.

HR 519 recognizes the tradition of fishing in the state and the work of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in maintaining and promoting fishing, including the management of more than 4,000 miles of trout streams; 12,000 miles of warm water streams; 500,000 acres of impoundments for public benefit; 11 public fishing areas; 10 fish hatcheries; 168 public boat ramps; and millions of fish annually stocked in freshwater resources. HR 519, however, also states there is confusion among the public, DNR, law enforcement, and elected officials over where the public may lawfully fish due to a lack of clarity in the law. The study committee was established to examine the benefit of the extent of the public's right to fish as well as any conflicts in law between the public's right to fish and private property rights.

The committee consisted of 12 members of the House of Representatives. On June 5, 2023, Speaker Jon Burns appointed the following members: Representative James Burchett, chair; Representative David Jenkins; Representative Al Williams; Representative Lynn Smith; Representative Stan Gunter; Representative Trey Rhodes; Representative Victor Anderson; Representative Rob Leverett; Representative Vance Smith; Representative David Knight; Representative Mack Jackson; and Representative Will Wade.

MEETINGS

The House Study Committee on Fishing Access to Freshwater Resources held four meetings that were open to testimony from stakeholder group representatives and members of the public:¹

October 4th, 2023 (Flint River) at Towerhouse Farm Brewery, Gay, Georgia

Link to Recording of Meeting: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGvM_Y544vU

The following individuals provided testimony at the meeting: Ruth Nash (Mayor of Gay); Brandon Rogers (Pike County Manager); Scott Robinson (Georgia Department of Natural Resources); Mike Worley (Georgia Wildlife Federation); Gordon Rogers (Flint Riverkeeper); April Lipscomb (Southern Environmental Law Center); Lee Nash; Ben Brewton (Yellow Jacket Shoals); Quint Rogers; Mark Woodall; Welton Bettis; Allen Ragsdale; Shawn and Joshua Lumsden; Fletcher Sams (Altamaha Riverkeeper); Walker Chandler; and Representative Beth Camp (135th District).

¹ The committee thanks the three host representatives (Representative David Jenkins in Gay; Representative Victor Anderson in Clarkesville; and Representative Johnny Chastain in Blue Ridge), as well as Georgia Southern University Director of Government Affairs Brian Harris in Statesboro, GA, for their work in organizing the meetings and the venues for their hospitality in hosting the meetings.

The committee also received and reviewed written testimony from other stakeholder groups and members of the public. That testimony was distributed to all members of the committee.