



**SAVANNAH RIVERKEEPER®**

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August 28, 2017

Congressman Rick Allen  
2743 Perimeter Parkway  
Bldg. 200, Suite 225  
Augusta, GA 30909

Dear Mr. Allen,

A recent letter sent in response to one of our members was shared with us concerning the conversion of the New Savannah Bluff Dam into a rock dam. In it, you stated that your office is in constant contact with the key stakeholders regarding the issue.

While we realize that perhaps we failed to engage with you in a meaningful way, Savannah Riverkeeper represents more than 1,000 members in our basin who are invested in the future of the Savannah River. We work in the interest of 1.5 million people who rely on it for drinking, industry, recreation, agriculture and more. Given that and our extensive involvement in the issue, we should certainly be considered key stakeholders included in these constant conversations. Furthermore, we are in disagreement with your current stance on the New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam replacement.

For more than fifteen years, Savannah Riverkeeper has worked to protect and restore the Savannah River, helping ensure that projects in any portion of the basin are balanced with the needs of the other 300+ miles. We were, for example, serving as stakeholders on the project working to ensure adequate mitigation of environmental impacts for the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project (SHEP), helping outline the plans for SHEP which exist today. One such requirement, a fish passage for endangered Shortnose and Atlantic Sturgeon has found itself in the middle of the Lock and Dam debate. We have long advocated for combining the fish ladder with the concrete structure, satisfying ongoing efforts to restore a variety of critical fish populations that have been suffering for decades.

In 2016, we worked with Senate and Congressional staffers to draft language in the WIIN bill. We met with key members of your staff on various visits to Washington, D.C. throughout that process. The updates to this piece of legislation were critical in giving protection to the City of Augusta's upstream pool, and leveraged the federal funds to do so. This is the first time since the 1990s that funds and mechanism to protect the pool will actually exist. It has come to our attention through media coverage and letters from your office that you seek to undo this language. We are directly

requesting that you cease those activities, leaving WIIN as it was passed and helping our community look towards the future. With such an amazing opportunity at our fingertips, it would be to the detriment of many of your own constituents to block progress for the benefit of a few. We advocate for the following course of action:

1. The Corps of Engineers should advance the proposal to replace the NSBLD dam structure with a rock dam; and
2. Funds need to be identified to rehabilitate the lock system to maintain its functionality, and allow for the adaptation of its structure to a destination whitewater center.

We believe replacing the aging dam structure with a rock dam not only provides safe passage for the fish, but will also provide the greatest protection for the current pool level desired by the upstream community, and would be a great advancement for the health and water quality of the river itself.

We strongly support the rehabilitation of the lock system that would open up opportunities for enhanced recreation and economic growth. We are working to identify avenues for public-private partnership to facilitate converting the lock system into a whitewater course. This simple change in use of the locks broadens possibilities for funding and expands accessibility of the river to anyone that can afford a motor boat, kayak, canoe, raft or rental. It would also represent significant progress towards revitalization of South Augusta, providing a destination zone to capitalize on tourism dollars in an area of town badly in need of capital investment.

Savannah Riverkeeper this summer submitted official comment to the Corps of Engineers during their open comment period. We applaud the Corps for proactively seeking to identify an approach that provides effective fish passage while minimizing any negative environmental and social consequences of modifying the lock and dam. Their willingness to explore the combination of two large and necessary projects will allow considerable cost savings for local taxpayers, as well as the best possible outcome for the Savannah River and those desiring the upstream pool. Those comments are attached, as well as a few other materials we have created to help educate our citizens.

We hope you will take what we have provided into consideration and join us in moving towards a clean, safe, and smart future for the New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam.

Sincerely,

Tonya Bonitatibus

Riverkeeper & Executive Director,  
Savannah Riverkeeper