

INTRODUCTION

The House Study Committee on Navigable Streams and Related Matters was created by the passage of House Resolution 1554 during the 2024 Session of the Georgia General Assembly.¹

HR 1554 recognizes Georgia's navigable streams as a precious resource for the state that serve as a magnet for outdoor enthusiasts and a valuable asset to owners of adjacent properties. However, HR 1554 notes that identifying which of the state's streams constitute navigable streams is a challenging legal and factual inquiry. Having a greater degree of certainty regarding which streams are navigable, what the corresponding rights are regarding navigable streams, and what uses are permitted on navigable streams would be desirable, as the resolution notes.

The committee consisted of seven members of the House of Representatives. HR 1554 calls for the committee to consist of the chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources and the Environment; the Majority Whip of the House of Representatives; an attorney at law with experience in water rights and property rights; and up to four members of the House of Representatives. On June 20, 2024, Speaker Jon Burns appointed the following members: Representative Lynn Smith, chair; Representative Stan Gunter; Representative Al Williams; Representative John Corbett; Representative Johnny Chastain; Representative James Burchett; and Mr. Jud Turner.

MEETINGS

The House Study Committee on Navigable Streams and Related Matters held three meetings that were open to testimony from stakeholder group representatives and members of the public:²

August 15th, 2024 at the Georgia State Capitol

Link to Recording of Meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-y6tvI4o7o8&t=756s>

- The following individuals presented at the meeting: Jud Turner; Jeff Cown (Director, Environmental Protection Division); Anna Truszczynski (Chief, Watershed Protection Branch at EPD); and Scott Robinson (Georgia DNR Chief of Fisheries Division).

¹ As discussed later in the report, this study committee follows the 2023 House Study Committee on Fishing Access to Freshwater Resources, which examined the public's right to fish particular waterways. This study committee viewed its charge as a continuation of that study committee's work and agreed to incorporate the 2023 study committee's findings and recommendations into its discussion, which this report reflects.

² The committee thanks Nicole Chappelle, Shana Jones from the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources for their work and assistance in organizing the meetings. In addition, the committee thanks Unicoi State Park and Lodge as well as The Donald W. Nixon Centre for Performing and Visual Arts for hosting committee meetings. Finally, the committee thanks House Media Services for livestreaming the meetings.