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Governor Riley Announces Critical Water War Victory

MONTGOMERY—Governor Bob Riley hailed a major victory today for Alabama in its long-running water war with Georgia.

The United States Court of Appeals in Washington today ruled that a secret settlement agreement entered into between Georgia, the Corps of Engineers, and Atlanta-area water users is illegal under federal law. The agreement, which was signed in 2003, would have allocated nearly 25% of Lake Lanier, a federal reservoir on the Chattahoochee River, for Atlanta's water supply. This would have resulted in major reductions in water reaching Alabama downstream.

"This is the most consequential legal ruling in the 18-year history of the water war, and one of the most important in the history of the State of Alabama," said Governor Riley. "The ruling invalidates the massive water grab that Georgia tried to pull off."

"The ruling will have far reaching consequences. It establishes that the decades-old practice of Atlanta taking more and more water from the federal reservoirs in the Coosa and Chattahoochee Rivers without any legal authority to do so will not stand," said Riley.

In 1990, the State of Alabama challenged the practices of the Corps of Engineers to elevate Atlanta's water supply needs over downstream interests in Alabama. In its ruling today, the appellate court has agreed that Alabama is correct on the most critical legal issue in the water war litigation.

Alabama is currently engaged in discussions with Georgia and Florida to reach a negotiated solution to the interstate water dispute.

"I hope this ruling will enhance the prospects for a fair and equitable deal among the three states," said Riley. "The secret agreement that the appellate court threw out today had been a major stumbling block for the last five years in our efforts to work out a reasonable sharing deal for this precious resource."

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For more information, contact the Governor's Press Office at (334) 242-7150.