

Georgia's water runs through one contested lake and a century of pipe. Your capital plan has to keep up.

About 80% of metro Atlanta's supply comes from the Chattahoochee River and two federal reservoirs — Lake Lanier and Allatoona — with Lanier at the center of a three-state fight going back 35 years. Below it sit pipes near 100 years old, a region adding tens of thousands of people a year, and a PFAS bill measured in the hundreds of millions. For a utility CFO or capital lead, every one of those forces reshuffles the projects on your list. Invizion helps Georgia utilities re-sequence a capital portfolio in a click — and defend every decision.

~80%¹ Of metro Atlanta's water supply comes from Lake Lanier and the Chattahoochee River — the source three states fought over for 35 years.	\$45.3B² Georgia's 20-year water infrastructure need — \$19.7B for drinking water and \$25.6B for wastewater.	\$2B³ Atlanta's estimated 20-plus-year water and sewer investment after the 2024 water-main failures.	~\$159M⁴ PFAS settlement won by the city of Rome from carpet makers upstream — enough to fund a new \$100M treatment plant.
---	--	--	--

THE GEORGIA LANDSCAPE

Four forces are moving your project list at once

None of these is theoretical, and none of them waits for your next budget cycle. Together they mean the capital plan you approved last year may already be the wrong plan.

SUPPLY — THE WATER WARS

Most of metro Atlanta's water depends on one lake it had to fight for

Lake Lanier and the Chattahoochee River supply roughly 80% of metro Atlanta's water.¹ That supply was contested for 35 years. Alabama first sued the Army Corps of Engineers in 1990; in 2011 the Eleventh Circuit ruled Congress intended Lanier to serve as a metro water supply, and in April 2021 the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously rejected Florida's bid to cap Georgia's withdrawals at 1992 levels.¹

The litigation is settled for now, but the dependence is not. When most of a region draws from one federally operated reservoir, storage, reuse, and interconnection projects stop being optional line items — they are the hedge against the next drought or the next lawsuit.

COMPLIANCE — AGING PIPE

Century-old mains and a consent decree on the same clock

In late May 2024 a cascade of water-main breaks in downtown and Midtown Atlanta — including a 30-inch main — left the city under a boil-water advisory for about six days; officials blamed decay, corrosion, and pipe age approaching 100 years.⁵ Atlanta now estimates a multibillion-dollar, 20-plus-year program — on the order of \$2 billion — to renew roughly 4,000 miles of pipe.³

That renewal stacks on top of a federal sewer consent decree dating to 1998–1999. The city has cut overflow volumes by about 99% but still faces a July 1, 2027 deadline and roughly \$600–700 million of remaining work it is seeking relief on.⁶ Atlanta held water and sewer rates flat with no increase since 2012 and carries about \$2.43 billion in debt against a \$1.46 billion five-year capital program — so every new dollar has to be sequenced against what is already committed.⁷

DEMAND — GROWTH

A region still adding a mid-sized city every year

The 11-county Atlanta region reached about 5.29 million people in 2025, adding 64,400 residents between April 2024 and April 2025, with Forsyth and Cherokee counties leading at 2.4% growth¹

Every new service connection is a capacity commitment.

Growth-driven treatment and distribution capital competes for the same dollars as renewal and compliance — and the sequencing between them is exactly what boards and county commissions fight over.

QUALITY — PFAS

The carpet capital's chemistry is now a downstream capital bill

Dalton, Georgia, produces most of the world's carpet, and PFAS discharged upstream has reached utilities on the Oostanaula and Conasauga rivers. The city of Rome switched water sources in 2016 and later settled with carpet makers and chemical suppliers for nearly \$159 million — including \$65M from Shaw, \$42.5M from Mohawk, and \$25M from Dalton Utilities — enough to build a new \$100 million treatment plant at no cost to residents⁴

PFAS is not a Rome-only problem. Georgia's federal water funding has already gone toward PFAS-related upgrades in Clayton, Chatsworth, and Calhoun² For utilities without a settlement to draw on, PFAS treatment is a new funded mandate that has to find a place in an already-full plan.

WHO RUNS GEORGIA'S WATER

A municipal state — big county and city systems, backed by wholesale authorities

Georgia's water is overwhelmingly public. The Public Service Commission regulates power, gas, and telecom — not water — so rates are set locally by county commissions, city councils, and authority boards. Large county and city utilities dominate, supplied in part by regional wholesale authorities, with thousands of small community systems below them.

County & municipal utilities

Rates set by county commissions and city councils · capital approved by governing boards

City of Atlanta Dept. of Watershed Management ~3,000–4,000 mi of water & sewer line; federal consent decrees⁵

Gwinnett County Dept. of Water Resources ~1M residents · ~4,000 mi water, 3,000 mi sewers⁹

Cobb County Water System 197,000+ accounts · ~3,100 mi water main¹⁰

DeKalb County Sewer consent-decree program funded via WIFIA¹¹

Clayton County, Fulton, Augusta, Savannah, Columbus Other large county & city systems

Wholesale authorities & small systems

Regional suppliers and the long tail of community systems

Cobb County–Marietta Water Authority 2nd-largest wholesaler in GA · 900,000+ served · 172 MGD¹²

1,778 community water systems statewide Of 2,484 active public systems; most rely on groundwater¹³

Small & rural systems Where funding gaps and PFAS costs hit hardest

Private / HOA systems Not rate-regulated by the state¹⁴

The Cobb County–Marietta Water Authority sells treated water to eight municipal retail suppliers and one industrial customer.¹²

No state rate board — so the pressure is local, and constant

Unlike most states, Georgia has no utilities commission setting water rates. That puts the burden of justification squarely on county commissions, city councils, and federal regulators — and the question is the same everywhere: why this project, why now, why at this cost?

Georgia Public Service Commission regulates electric, natural gas, and telecom — but explicitly *not* water or sewer, which are handled by local government.¹⁴

County commissions & city councils set water and sewer rates and approve capital plans in public, in front of ratepayers — Atlanta held rates flat from 2012, which is now part of its funding problem.⁷

Georgia EPD holds Safe Drinking Water Act primacy over the state's 2,484 public water systems — lead service line inventories, PFAS monitoring, and the compliance capital that follows.¹³

Federal consent decrees still drive spending — Atlanta's sewer decree runs to a July 1, 2027 deadline, and DeKalb County operates under its own sewer decree.⁶

The money is moving — can your plan absorb it?

Georgia utilities have more capital funding available than they've had in a generation, from the state SRF programs to WIFIA to litigation proceeds. The constraint is no longer only dollars — it's readiness: which projects are shovel-ready, which qualify, and how the timing lines up with everything else on the list.

GEFA (Georgia Environmental Finance Authority) administers the state's Drinking Water & Clean Water SRFs. The FY2025 Drinking Water SRF alone totaled about \$97.1M — \$29.6M base plus \$67.5M IJA supplemental — with roughly \$40.8M available as principal forgiveness.¹⁵

~\$804M in federal SRF water funding has flowed to Georgia since 2022 — about \$571M for drinking water and \$232M for clean water, including roughly \$190M dedicated to lead pipe replacement.²

~\$611M in WIFIA loans have closed for Georgia utilities — \$284M and \$265M to DeKalb County and \$62M to the City of Atlanta.¹¹

Litigation proceeds are now a funding source too — Rome's ~\$159M PFAS settlement covers a new \$100M treatment plant and its operating costs at no charge to ratepayers.⁴

GEORGIA WATER, IN BRIEF

Questions Georgia utility leaders are asking

Short, sourced answers — the same facts we'll dig into on a call, in the context of your system.

How much of metro Atlanta's water comes from Lake Lanier?

About 80% of metro Atlanta's water supply comes from Lake Lanier and the Chattahoochee River, according to the Atlanta Regional Commission. That dependence is what made the tri-state "water wars" with Alabama and Florida so consequential; the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled in Georgia's favor in April 2021, but the reliance on a single federal reservoir remains a core supply risk¹

What caused Atlanta's 2024 water crisis, and what will it cost to fix?

In late May 2024, a series of water-main breaks in downtown and Midtown Atlanta — on pipes approaching 100 years old — put the city under a boil-water advisory for roughly six days.⁵ The city has since committed to a multibillion-dollar, 20-plus-year program — on the order of \$2 billion — to replace hundreds of miles of aging pipe.³

Does the Georgia Public Service Commission set water rates?

No. The Georgia PSC regulates electric, natural gas, and telecommunications utilities — it does not regulate water or sewer service. Water and sewer rates are set locally by county commissions, city councils, and authority boards, which is why capital justification in Georgia is fought out in front of local governing bodies and ratepayers rather than a state rate board.¹⁴

How big is Georgia's water infrastructure funding gap?

EPA's needs assessments put Georgia's 20-year water infrastructure need at about \$45.3 billion — \$19.7 billion for drinking water and \$25.6 billion for wastewater. Against that, roughly \$804 million in federal State Revolving Fund water dollars has flowed to Georgia since 2022, alongside about \$611 million in closed WIFIA loans.²¹¹

How is PFAS affecting Georgia water utilities?

PFAS discharged by the carpet industry around Dalton has contaminated downstream drinking water. The city of Rome switched sources in 2016 and settled with carpet manufacturers and chemical suppliers for nearly \$159 million, funding a new \$100 million treatment plant. State funds have also gone toward PFAS-related upgrades in Clayton, Chatsworth, and Calhoun — and federal drinking-water limits mean more systems will face treatment capital.⁴²

How does Invizion help Georgia water utilities plan capital?

Invizion is scenario-based capital portfolio optimization for water utilities. It lets you model how a consent-decree deadline, a PFAS mandate, a growth surge, or a delayed SRF award reshuffles your whole project list, re-sequence the portfolio automatically against the constraints you set, and keep a defensible record of every trade-off for your commission, council, or board. The best next step is a short first meeting to look at it against your own program.

REFERENCES

Sources

Every figure in this briefing is tied to a primary or authoritative source.

1. Atlanta Regional Commission, "Tri-State Water Wars Overview" — Lanier/Chattahoochee ~80% of metro water; 2011 Eleventh Circuit ruling; April 2021 U.S. Supreme Court decision, 2021–2024. atlantaregional.org
2. Water Program Portal, "Georgia's Federal Water Funding" fact sheet (EPA DWWSA/CWNS) — \$19.7B drinking water + \$25.6B wastewater = \$45.3B 20-year need; ~\$804M SRF since 2022 (\$571M DWSRF, \$232M CWSRF); ~\$190M for lead lines; PFAS upgrades in Clayton/Chatsworth/Calhoun, 2026. waterprogramportal.org
3. Axios Atlanta, "Atlanta says it will cost \$2 billion to improve water system" — multibillion-dollar, 20-plus-year program; ~4,000 mi of pipe, many ~100 years old, March 2025. axios.com
4. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, "Rome to receive nearly \$159 million in 'forever chemicals' settlement" — \$65M Shaw, \$42.5M Mohawk, \$25M Dalton Utilities; new \$100M treatment plant; source switched 2016, June 2023. ajc.com
5. FOX 5 Atlanta, "Boil water advisory lifted in Atlanta after water main break repairs" — breaks May 31, 2024 (incl. 30-inch main), ~6-day advisory lifted June 6; decay/corrosion/age; ~3,000 mi of infrastructure, June 2024. fox5atlanta.com
6. Center for Civic Innovation, "City nears end of water consent decree, seeks relief on final \$600M" — 1998–1999 decree, ~99% overflow reduction, July 1 2027 deadline, ~\$600–700M remaining, May 2026. civicatlanta.org
7. The Bond Buyer, "Atlanta to offer \$1.1 billion of water and sewer bonds" — \$1.46B five-year CIP, \$2.43B debt (April 2026), no rate increase since 2012, 2024 water-main breaks cited, 2026. bondbuyer.com
8. Atlanta Regional Commission, "Atlanta Region Adds 64,400 Residents in Past Year" — 11-county region 5,285,474; +64,400 April 2024–April 2025; Forsyth & Cherokee +2.4%, August 2025. atlantaregional.org
9. Gwinnett County Department of Water Resources, "What We Do" — serves nearly 1M residents; ~4,000 mi water distribution, 3,000+ mi sewer; 25.5B gallons/yr, 2025. gwinnettcounty.com
10. Cobb County Water System, "About Your Water" — 197,000+ accounts; ~3,100 mi water main, ~2,600 mi sewer; 172 MGD water / 122 MGD wastewater capacity, 2025. cobbcounty.gov
11. U.S. EPA, WIFIA Closed Loans — DeKalb County \$284M (2022) and \$265M (2020); City of Atlanta \$62M (2020); ~\$611M total to Georgia. epa.gov
12. Cobb County–Marietta Water Authority, "About Us" — 2nd-largest wholesale provider in Georgia, 900,000+ residents, 172 MGD across two plants, 8 municipal + 1 industrial customer, 2025. ccmwa.org
13. University of Georgia CAES, "Drinking Water Protection in Georgia" (Bulletin 1242–5) — 2,484 active public water systems, 1,778 community systems; 80% of residents on surface water, EPD oversight. fieldreport.caes.uga.edu
14. Georgia Public Service Commission, "About the PSC" / "What Is Regulated" — regulates electric, gas, telecom; does not regulate water or sewer service, 2025. psc.ga.gov
15. Georgia Environmental Finance Authority, "2025 Base and Supplemental Drinking Water SRF Intended Use Plan" — FY2025 DWSRF \$29.571M base + \$67.510M supplemental (~\$97.1M); ~\$40.77M principal forgiveness, 2025. gefa.georgia.gov

ABOUT INVIZION

Capital program optimization for utilities

Invizion is a purpose-built capital lifecycle management platform for water and wastewater utilities. It integrates budgeting, CIP, scenario analysis, and funding-source tracking in one system — so utilities can re-sequence a capital portfolio in a click and demonstrate audit-ready, defensible decisions to regulators, boards, and rating agencies.

See what a defensible Georgia capital plan looks like — book a 20-minute first meeting.

Book your first meeting →