

SUSTAINABILITY DEPARTMENT



WELCOME TO OUR

Monthly Newsletter

Welcome to the tenth issue of our monthly newsletter! We are thrilled to be able to share what we are doing at the Athens-Clarke County Sustainability Department with you. Join us each month as we explore all things sustainability and how you can get involved!

Putting Energy into Greener Spaces



In this newsletter you will find:

Latest projects, free resources, and upcoming events!

THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

HANNAH CHAFFEE

Between EMCs (electric membership cooperatives), the PSC (Public Service Commission) and the IRP (Integrated Resource Plan), it's easy to feel like you're drowning in the daunting alphabet soup that is state energy policy. But fear not! Pluck up your courage because today we're diving into all things Public Service Commission.

The Georgia Public Service Commission (commonly referred to as the PSC) is a state agency that oversees multiple utility industries. Each state has their own version of a Public Service Commission, though some function differently or go by a different name.

Whether you know it or not, the PSC plays a crucial role in how you go about your daily life. The infrastructure that runs electricity to your coffee pot and clicks on your electric stove top in the morning: the PSC makes rulings on it all – how it gets to you and what you'll pay for it. The PSC regulates underground facilities (think "Call Before You Dig"), telecommunications, natural gas and electric utilities.

The PSC is made up of one representative from each of the 5 Public Service Commission Districts (see right for regions and current commissioners). Terms last 6 years and voting for seats is staggered. Candidates must reside in the district they are running for, but all Georgia voters can (and should!) vote on every commission race.

PSC COMMISSIONERS:



DISTRICT 4: Lauren "Bubba" McDonald



DISTRICT 3: Fitz Johnson



**DISTRICT 2:
Tim Echols,
Vice-Chairman**



**DISTRICT 1:
Jason Shaw,
PSC Chairman**



**DISTRICT 5: Tricia
Pridemore**

THE PSC REGULATES:

ELECTRICITY



NATURAL GAS



TELECOMS



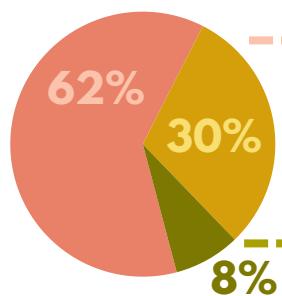
UNDERGROUND FACILITIES



Today we'll be focusing on how the PSC regulates our electricity. Electric utilities in Georgia can be divided into three types based on ownership: investor owned, Electric Membership Cooperatives (EMCs), and Municipal Electric Systems.

There is only one investor owned electricity provider in the state: Georgia Power. There are 41 EMCs. These are member-owned, not-for-profit utilities. Then there are Municipal Electric Systems (also called "Munis"). These are non-profit electric utilities that provide energy on a county or city level and are directed by local elected officials. Georgia currently has 51 cities and 1 county that fall into this category.

GA ELECTRIC UTILITIES: 2022 RETAIL SALES OF ELECTRICITY

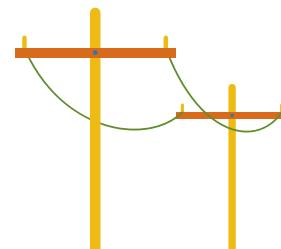


INVESTOR OWNED: GA POWER

ELECTRIC MEMBERSHIP COOPERATIVE

ELECTRIC CITIES

Source: US Energy Information Administration Form 861



While the PSC fully regulates Georgia Power, their oversight of EMCs and Munis is limited and largely pertains to territorial disputes. Generally speaking, your electric provider is predetermined based on what utility is assigned to where you live. Athens-Clarke County residents are served by 4 different electric providers. Three of which are local EMCs: Rayle, Walton and Jackson. A majority of Athens-Clarke County residents are served by GA Power.

For the PSC's regulation of Georgia Power, there are several key proceedings that generally occur every three years: the Integrated Resource Plan (which lays Georgia Power's plan to meet energy needs for the next 20 years), the Rate Case (which determines the rate Georgia Power can charge customers), and the Fuel Case (which determines what Georgia Power can charge based on fuel source).



Making a 20 year plan every three years . . . yes, we know the PSC is confusing but there is no better time to learn and get involved because the PSC's Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) is kicking off this month and the PSC want to hear from you!

Why is getting involved in the IRP so important? The IRP determines what Georgia Power will plan for: predictions on how much energy they will need to produce, which power plants will be retired and which will be created, what their fuel source breakdown will be, how that power is getting to you and how they will be decreasing that energy demand through energy efficiency efforts.

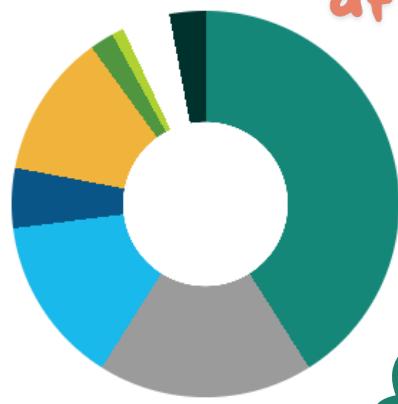
The 6 month process of the IRP will include three public hearings in Atlanta: March 25-28, May 27-30 and a rebuttal hearing June 23-25. The first hour of each day's hearing will be reserved for public comment. But there are plenty of other ways to advocate for your interests: individuals can attend regular committee meeting or send comments to the PSC via mail, email or through the [PSC's electronic portal](#).

You can also reach out to your PSC representatives. Tim Echols is the current Commissioner for District 2 (which Athens falls under). His office can be emailed at: techols@psc.ga.gov

Stay involved and stay tuned: ACC Sustainability will continue to share more details of the IRP in coming newsletters!

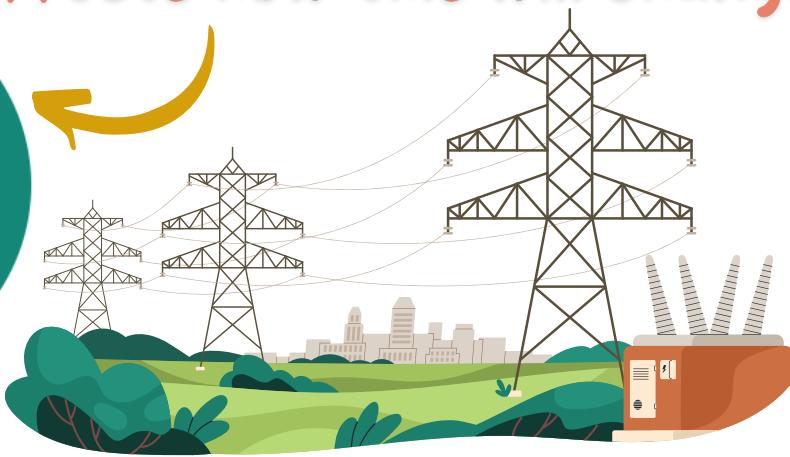
Georgia Power 2024 Capacity Mix

- Oil – 3%
- Natural Gas – 41%
- Coal – 18%
- Nuclear – 14%
- Hydro – 5%
- Solar* – 12%
- Bio-Mass – 2%
- Wind – 1%
- DSO* – 4%



* Capacity Mix Disclaimer

Your involvement in the IRP affects how this will change!



Information sourced from Southface and Georgia Interfaith Power and Light resources.

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE!](#)

Join us for NATIONAL INVASIVE SPECIES AWARENESS WEEK!

HANNAH CHAFFEE

It's finally here: Invasive Species Awareness Week (NISAW)! Invasive species can wreak havoc on local ecosystems—outcompeting native plants and animals, disrupting habitats, and even introducing new diseases. This leads to biodiversity loss and long-term environmental and economic consequences. Led by the North American Invasive Species Management Association (NAISMA), NISAW (Feb 24th - Feb 28th) unites communities, experts, and organizations to spread awareness and promote action.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

[CLICK HERE TO CHECK OUT ACC WASTE MANAGEMENT INSTAGRAM!](#)

To celebrate NISAW, we're teaming up with ACC Waste Management to highlight the impact non-native species have in our communities. Did you know you can compost your invasives after removing them? Check out ACC Waste Management's Instagram to learn more about composting and all things trash/recycling! (NOTE: Not all invasives should be composted. Please contact ACC Sustainability if you have questions on which species can be composted and their proper removal.



EARTH DAY VOLUNTEERING!

This Earth Day, Leisure Services Trails and Open Space and ACC Sustainability are coordinating a volunteer clean up at Agaur Plaza. Check out our UPCOMING EVENTS section at the end of the newsletter to learn more or sign up [here](#)!

READ ON AND STAY TUNED!

Keep reading to check out our Invasive of the Month, Bradford pear, and stay tuned to learn more about common invasive species in Athens and how to treat them!



Bradford Pear

A STINKY INVASIVE

IMIR ROBINSON AND STEPHANIE GREEN

If you've ever noticed a tree bursting with white flowers in early spring and thought, "Wow, that's pretty!"—you might have been looking at a Bradford pear. But don't let its beauty fool you—this tree has a dark side.

What's the Big Deal?

The Bradford pear (*Pyrus calleryana* 'Bradford') was introduced in the U.S. in the early 1900s as a fast-growing, ornamental tree. People loved its unique lollipop shape, bright fall colors, and ability to grow just about anywhere. It seemed like the perfect landscape tree—until we realized it was a major problem. Even though the Bradford pear was bred to be sterile and thornless, it can cross-pollinate with other varieties of Callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*), a highly invasive tree. When that happens, the trees produce small, seeded fruits that birds love to eat. The problem? Birds scatter those seeds everywhere, leading to dense, thorny thickets that crowd out native plants.

Why Should You Care?

These wild-growing pear trees:

- Spread aggressively, taking over fields, roadsides, and forests
- Grow thorns up to 3–4 inches long—making them painful to remove
- Reduce biodiversity by pushing out native plants and trees

What started as a well-intentioned landscaping choice has turned into an environmental headache.



PHOTO CREDIT (TOP): DAN TENAGLIA, BUGWOOD

PHOTO CREDIT (BOTTOM): JAMES H. MILLER, BUGWOOD

What Can You Do?

Remove and Manage – If you have a Bradford pear, consider removing it before it can add to the spread of invasive Callery pears. The most effective way to do this is by cutting it down and removing the root system to prevent regrowth. If uprooting isn't possible, you can cut the tree and apply herbicide directly to the stump. The recommended options are glyphosate or triclopyr, which help prevent the tree from resprouting.

Choose Native Alternatives – Instead of Bradford pears, plant native trees that support local wildlife. Great options include:

- American fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*) – Beautiful white fringe-like flowers
- Eastern dogwood (*Cornus florida*) – Iconic, with spring blossoms and fall berries
- Carolina silverbell (*Halesia carolina*) – Elegant, bell-shaped flowers
- Serviceberry (*Amelanchier spp.*) – White flowers in spring, edible berries in summer

Stop the Spread – If you see a wild-growing Callery pear sapling, remove it before it can take over.

Spread the Word – Many homeowners and landscapers don't realize the harm these trees cause. Share this info with your community!

Map it if you see it on ACC parks or natural areas – Use the [EDDMaps](#) web-based mapping system to document where you saw it. This is a great community science tool that can be downloaded on your phone. Your mapped location of Bradford pears will help us work toward removing them from Athen's natural areas.

The Bradford pear may be beautiful, but it's time we stop planting trouble. Let's work together to keep our local landscapes healthy and diverse!



PHOTO CREDIT: BRITT SLATTERY, BUDWOOD

TIPS FOR A GREENER LIFESTYLE!

How can we live sustainably?

IN THIS SERIES WE EXPLORE HOW WE CAN BE SUSTAINABLE TOGETHER, RIGHT HERE IN ATHENS-CLARKE COUNTY!



THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

MINDFUL CONSUMPTION

HANNAH CHAFFEE

Reducing consumption is not nearly as glamourous as it's 'siblings' reuse and recycle. However, reducing consumption is an undervalued but crucial tool in fighting for a sustainable future in our consumerist society.

Today we will be discussing mindful consumption. Mindful consumption isn't about not buying anything – you need things and deserve to have things you enjoy. You should not feel guilty for being a person! Mindful consumption is about strategically investing in items that improve your overall wellbeing. We've provided a combination of tips and questions you can ask yourself when deciding when and what to purchase if you're looking to reduce your impact on both the planet and your wallet:

- Is this an impulse buy? If so, STOP! A great way to avoid excessive spending is to avoid impulse purchases. Give yourself anywhere from a day to a week, then revisit the decision. You may realize that it was a spur of the moment desire. When we make impulse purchases, we are often trying to solve for a different problem. Sadly, retail therapy is not a substitute for actual therapy!
- Are you hungry or tired? It may sound silly, but your brain can have a difficult time evaluating a potential purchase if you aren't in the right head space.
- How long will you get value from this item? Is it a tool you only need to use once? Do you have room to store this item? Can you borrow this item from someone else or rent it?
- Is this part of a trend? Evaluate if you will gain meaningful value from this item long term?
- What quality is this item? Will it break quickly and cannot be repaired? Consider waiting to invest in a higher quality version of the item if you will use the item for a long time.
- Should you just save your money? Maybe! Consider your financial wellbeing.
- If this is a purchase you want to make, ask yourself: How can I find a more sustainable way to purchase this item? Consider buying from small businesses, local creators, garage sales, Facebook Marketplace or eBay!
- What will I do when I no longer need this item? Researching proper disposal methods for an item before purchasing is an important aspect of sustainable consumption.

Remember, sustainable consumption is a process of balance. Depending on your situation, you may not have the time, money or energy to put a lot of thought into your consumption habits. It's important to give yourself grace and credit for the changes you can make!



UPCOMING EVENTS:



DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO GOES ABOVE AND BEYOND CREATING A MORE SUSTAINABLE TOMORROW FOR ATHENS?



Nominate them
for a GreenLife Award!

[Learn more here!](#)
Deadline to Nominate: March 7th

JOIN US FOR A CLEANUP PROJECT AT AGUAR PLAZA! EARTH DAY APRIL 22ND 2025

Volunteering will consist of cleaning stone signs, collecting litter, cleaning pathways, removing vegetation, and more.

Athens-Clarke County Trails and Open Space and Sustainability Department will provide all necessary tools.

SIGN UP HERE!

Bring your enthusiasm!



Put in some elbow grease!



Volunteers can park at the East Broad Dudley Park lot for easy access.

PUTTING ENERGY INTO GREENER SPACES

Athens-Clarke County Sustainability Department

www.accgov.com/green

706-613-3838