

# Committee on Resources

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**Mr. Larry Lesser**  
**President and Owner**  
**Broadway Tackle**

Testimony  
Before the Committee on Resources  
Subcommittee on Water and Power

Hearing on Reviving Hydroelectric Power on the Savannah River; A Clean and Renewable Resource  
September 27, 2004

Good morning. My name is Larry Lesser. I own Broadway Tackle located at 1730 Broad Street. I have conducted business in Augusta for 25 years and for about 20 of those years from my present location next to the Augusta canal. A significant portion of my business has to do with recreational activities on or around the Canal

The Augusta Canal provides recreational opportunities for residents and visitors to the C.S.R.A and is an important part of attracting tourism to Augusta as well as to Columbia County. On any given day, one could just look at all of the activities that take place along the seven mile canal banks in the City and at the Pavilion in Columbia County located at the headgates, and you will see how greatly utilized the Canal is. Joggers, fishermen, canoers and kayakers, cyclists and nature lovers all find solace and relaxation adjacent to its banks.

The Augusta Canal provides us all a window into the history of our area. The canal is proof of what our City's business leaders and politicians of two centuries ago had in mind when the canal was constructed, that is, that Augusta could utilize hydropower and support a textile industry. The beautiful architectural works along its banks such as the King, Sibley, and Enterprise Mills as well as the chimney from the confederate gunpowder works attests to the important part the canal and Augusta played at that time. I quite often notice sight-seers pull over directly across the street from my store and take photographs of those sites. In my 25 years as a business owner in the Historic Harrisburg neighborhood, I've seen how many aspects of daily life are tied to the canal. Fishing, hunting, camping, and swimming were all part of growing up by the canal. Walking or driving to work at the King Mill or Sibley Mill or Enterprise Mill was a daily ritual.

It is appropriate that you hold a hearing on reviving hydropower in Augusta because our existing four hydro operations are in jeopardy if the recommendations of various federal and state agencies are approved by FERC. The most serious of their recommendations involve substantial reductions in the amount of water in the canal.

In my humble opinion, the Augusta Canal should not have any water diverted from its source at the wing dam in Columbia County to increase the flow of water into the Savannah River. Unfortunately, because of trade policies, the local textile industry that was the primary catalyst and beneficiary of the canal construction has had a decline, but we cannot allow that factor to diminish the importance of having the canal in Augusta.

Water from the Augusta Canal provides hydropower even now to several mills as well as to the pumping station that supplies Augusta's drinking water. Additionally, there are thousands of jobs that are textile and tourism related that hinge on the canal's existence.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is hoping that by sacrificing our Canal, the increased water flow in the River would create an improved habitat in the shoals area that stretches from the headgates, to the deeper portion of the river below the water pumping station at Goodrich St. Extension. An experiment a few years back, of introducing trout into that portion of the river failed, mainly I'm told, because of the insufficient amount of dissolved oxygen in the river caused by the Clarks Hill Dam. Would more water solve this problem and make the river a more viable habitat? I think not.

Whatever positive impact the increased water flow would have on an obscure plant or small insignificant species of fish would pale in comparison to the detrimental effects to abundant fish and habitat in our Canal. The Augusta Canal provides habitat for wildlife, supports a thriving fish population in its un-polluted waters, as any local fisherman will tell you. Bass, bream, perch, crappie and catfish, to name a few, have given sport and great table fare for hundreds of years to the historic neighborhood of Harrisburg. Turtles, muskrats, water snakes, songbirds and predatory birds exist in and in close proximity to the canal. Aquatic plant species thrive and provide beauty as well.

Lowering the water level of the Canal would also impact Lake Olmstead and Rae's Creek. What would it look like driving past Lake Olmstead, what was formerly a beautiful oasis in the middle of our city, but would now probably be a mosquito infested swamp? What would television viewers of the Master's golf tournament think when Rae's creek no longer fully flowed under the internationally recognized stone bridges.

I urge you take appropriate action to make it easier to keep our existing hydropower operations and the historic uses along the Augusta Canal operating as they have for over 150 years. It appears to me the current regulations and license renewal process is designed to eliminate rather than encourage their continued operation. You would be doing a great service for the citizens of our area if you could accomplish this.