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A wish list for greener days

Atlanta, nation need plans that lift environment

By Barbara Gallo

With America's population slipping past 300 million in 2006 and Atlanta's projected to nearly double in 30 years, perhaps it is time to think outside of the proverbial box if we hope for a greener Christmas next year. Obviously, we won't get there with partridges or pear trees.

Instead, what if the following gifts were squeezed under our tree in 2007?

Funds for additional research into the use of grease, food oils and nonedible food stuffs as a biomass energy supply. The University of Georgia and other leading research institutions have long been searching for biomass fuel alternatives as inexpensive as petroleum and diesel fuel. As petroleum fuel costs are sharply rising, let's fund new research, particularly using waste such as restaurant grease that otherwise ends up in landfills, clogs grease traps and fouls our sewer systems and water supplies.

Capture all of Georgia's landfill gas for energy use. Methane is a naturally occurring and clean-burning byproduct of waste decomposition. Following Georgia Power's example of turning DeKalb County landfill methane into a clean-burning green energy source, let's get industry — in concert with nearby public and private landfills — to bring supply and demand together, and put landfill gas to good use.

Tax credits or other incentives for reducing water consumption.

Encouraging homeowners to install rainwater collection equipment, dual flush toilets, reduced-flow shower heads, and other devices and equipment

will substantially reduce residential water consumption and reduce or eliminate the need for state-imposed outdoor watering bans.

Refocus Georgia's forestry industry (one of the country's largest) from a producer of paper and building supplies to a world leader in ethanol and bio-diesel production. This goal would be both economically and environmentally beneficial.

Develop the rest of Georgia's brownfields into success stories like Atlantic Station.

Turn our plastic bottles into carpet fiber? Making Georgia a leader in recycling plastic into carpet would also boost the economic health of the world's carpet capital — Dalton.

Acquire Atlanta Beltline right-of-way land for public use.

Build a water desalination plant. Since everyone agrees we need more water, what if Georgia, Florida, and Alabama — together — built a desalination plant? The resulting millions of gallons of desalinated water could then be used for agricultural and commercial/industrial uses, reducing those heavy demands on our limited surface water and groundwater supplies.

Convert the Georgia poultry industry's largest nonedible byproduct into a marketable resource. Chicken litter can be used as fertilizer high in nitrogen or as an energy source for heating hen houses and poultry farms. This has the side effect of minimizing poultry waste leeching into groundwater and also improves the top soil of our farm belt in South Georgia.

So what do you think, Santa? What if?

Barbara Gallo, an Atlanta environmental lawyer, was a litigator in the tri-state water treaty negotiations between Alabama, Georgia and Florida.