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MEDIA CONTACT:

Mary Eva Tredway/Tyre Sperling
Duffey Communications, Inc.
(404) 446-1673 / (404) 446-1670
mtredway/tsperling@duffey.com

**STATEWIDE WATERSMART CAMPAIGN KICKS OFF
TO HELP GEORGIANS SAVE THEIR LAWNS AND THEIR WATER!**

ATLANTA, Ga. (May 18, 2007) – The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Cobb County – Marietta Water Authority have joined forces to launch “*Save Water, Save Time, Save Money...waterSmart,*” a statewide educational program that teaches Georgians how to conserve water outdoors, especially during the hot summer months. The State of Georgia was declared to be in a level two drought response on April 18, 2007, and this initiative will help offer ways for homeowners to ‘beat the drought’ affecting the state. A level two drought limits outdoor water usage from midnight to 10 a.m. on designated days of the week.

"The waterSmart program helps everyone understand how to conserve water, and the importance of conservation as warmer weather and dry conditions spread across Georgia this summer," says Carol A. Couch, Director of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division. "However, waterSmart also provides water-saving information during periods of normal rainfall to help citizens conserve water and lower utility bills year-round."

The state waterSmart program will include a statewide education campaign throughout spring and summer to help all Georgians learn more about outdoor water conservation through a variety of topics from spring planting tips to information on irrigation systems. By raising awareness among consumers about water conservation, the education program aims to establish subtle habit changes among Georgians that will help them save water, money and their landscaping.

In addition to statewide outreach, waterSmart will also place special emphasis on six pilot communities across the state, including Albany, Augusta, Cobb County, Columbus, Dalton and Macon. These cities have been selected to implement a larger scaled program, which includes homeowner seminars as well as water conservation curriculum for classrooms. With support from community partners, such as local water providers, extension agents nature centers, and environmental education specialists, waterSmart will be implemented and customized to reach out to residents in each community.

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These additional resources were developed by the Education Roundtable, a partnership of organizations working together to develop coordinated environmental messages for Georgians created by DNR Commissioner Noel Holcomb. The Education Roundtable partners will support the waterSmart programs and the six targeted pilot communities to encourage water conservation related to outdoor usage.

"My vision for the waterSmart initiative is to rally community partners to deliver a high-quality education and outreach program about water conservation with a unified message," said DNR Commissioner Holcomb. "We hope that Georgians will hear the tips on how to reduce their outdoor water uses from many different sources in their community and take it to heart in their habits at home."

The DNR and the Education Roundtable have teamed up with waterSmart to offer simple, state-of-science tips for maintaining healthy lawns while using less water:

- * Don't water your lawn too frequently -- Generally, to remain healthy an established lawn needs about one inch of water every seven-to-ten days.
- * Soak, don't sprinkle. When you water, aim the nozzle at the base of plants so more water will reach the roots.
- * Turn off your automatic irrigation system when it rains – or better yet – use an automatic time controller and attach a rainfall sensor to turn off the irrigation system if significant rainfall occurred.
- * Don't water in the heat of the day. Water in the early morning hours (4 a.m. -10 a.m.) to prevent evaporation.
- * Using pine straw, bark chips or ground hardwood mulch on the roots of plants and trees helps the soil retain water and decreases the frequency of lawn-watering.

Water conservation brochures and other information are being distributed throughout the state and the six waterSmart pilot communities. To learn more about waterSmart, water conservation and the drought in Georgia, visit www.conservewatergeorgia.net.

About waterSmart

The waterSmart program was developed in conjunction with the Georgia Water Wise Council and the Cobb County Cooperative Extension Service. It is endorsed by the Georgia Green Industry Association and the Georgia Turf Association, as well as numerous lawn and garden experts. The waterSmart program also has partnered with DNR and the Education Roundtable to provide additional education and outreach tools aimed at reducing outdoor water use.

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