
FORMAL COMPLAINT AND DEMAND FOR INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

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TO:

Office of the Governor, State of Georgia

Attn: Lauren Curry, Chief of Staff / Email: Lauren.Curry@georgia.gov

CC: Sam Hatcher, Executive Counsel / Sam.Hatcher@georgia.gov

Georgia Department of Natural Resources

Attn: Walter Rabon, Commissioner

Email: Walter.Rabon@dnr.ga.gov, Commissioner.DNR@dnr.ga.gov

Georgia Environmental Protection Division

Attn: Jeff Cown, Director of the EPD / Email: Jeff.cown@dnr.ga.gov

CC: Anna Truszczynski, Deputy Director / Anna.Truszczynski@dnr.ga.gov

CC: Jennifer Welte, Assistant Branch Chief / Jennifer.Welte@dnr.ga.gov

RE: Lake Petit Dam (Cat. I High-Hazard) — Acceptance of Deceptive Compliance Filings, Omitted Hydraulic Data, and Structurally Impossible Stability Trends by Safe Dams Program Staff

Dear Chief of Staff Curry, Commissioner Rabon, and Director Cown:

Please find below a formal complaint regarding gross regulatory negligence and the acceptance of deceptive statements, data omissions, and structurally impossible safety trends in legally mandated engineering compliance filings for the Lake Petit Dam.

Executive Summary

This memorandum demands an immediate, independent investigation into the Safe Dams Program's oversight of the Lake Petit Dam (State ID No. 112-009-00462; NID No. GA00685, located in the community of Big Canoe, and located in Pickens County, GA.). Evidence shows that Program Manager David Griffin and Staff Engineer Kate Betsill have consistently accepted a deceptive technical narrative propagated in the dam's legally mandated Category I compliance filings, prepared and submitted by Geosyntec Consultants.

For years, a critical groundwater sensor (PZ G-2 Shallow) has flagged volatile water-level spikes inside the dam—direct evidence of potentially active seepage pathways threatening a high-hazard structure where failure presents a probable loss of human life. State regulators have allowed these readings to be dismissed using an excuse that defies basic physics.

Furthermore, in the recent 2026 regulatory filing cycle—precisely when physical field observations indicated that surface saturation and localized wet areas were expanding directly within the impacted G-2 zone—Griffin and Betsill actively permitted Geosyntec to suddenly reverse years of established reporting norms, accepting a compliance filing where the critical 'G' series hydraulic data points were completely omitted from the record altogether.

This is not an isolated defect in one inspection report. It is part of a broader regulatory pattern in which paper compliance has been allowed to override physical reality. In addition to the G-2 standpipe deception and the 2026 G-series data omission, the regulatory record also shows a 25-year stability contradiction: engineering reports documenting an aging, distressed dam have been systematically “corrected” by consultants to show improving safety factors, despite the dam physically aging and its seepage issues intensifying.

We demand a forensic audit of how the Safe Dams Program accepted compliance filings that suggest this high-hazard structure is somehow “getting better with age,” while also accepting reports that dismiss a volatile manual standpipe as “unreliable” and then omit the very hydraulic data needed to evaluate the danger.

1. The Targeted Deception: Singling Out the G-2 Sensor

In legally required engineering inspection reports submitted for successive regulatory cycles (2020, 2022, and 2024), Geosyntec engineers explicitly singled out this solitary sensor to dismiss its alarming readings. The exact, legally filed text states:

*"PZ G-2 Shallow data tends to be more reactive in a given period, showing fluctuations on the order of twice what the remainder of the PZs exhibit. While these trends are not currently considered a dam safety concern, data for the G-2 series of instruments should be reviewed carefully in subsequent measurement intervals to determine whether the trends accurately reflect conditions in the embankment and subsurface or **may be an indication that the instruments are becoming unreliable.**"*

To a non-engineer policymaker, this sounds like a routine equipment glitch. In reality, it is a calculated misdirection. The G-Series piezometers are not electronic "vibrating wire" sensors that provide automated instrumentation readings. The G-2 reading is manually taken from a hollow plastic pipe—an open standpipe—where an operator simply lowers a physical measuring tape down the tube to see where it gets wet. There is no complex "instrumentation" inside that borehole to possibly become "unreliable." **There is absolutely zero possibility of professional confusion or oversight here: for an elite engineering firm like Geosyntec to fabricate this scientifically impossible narrative, and for fully credentialed state regulators like Griffin and Betsill to rubber-stamp it while explicitly naming the G-2 sensor itself, represents an intentional, calculated deception designed to mask a severe structural hazard.**

2. The Critical Importance and Physical Reality of G-2

The G-2 Shallow standpipe is not a random instrument; it is the literal early-warning tripwire for structural piping in the dam.

- **The Critical Location:** G-2 is positioned precisely within the critical zone of the dam embankment where it monitors groundwater pressures directly feeding expanding surface saturation zones at the downstream toe.
- **The "Dipstick" Reality:** G-2 is not an electronic sensor. It is a 1-inch hollow PVC plastic pipe driven straight into the earth. To read it, an operator must physically walk down the slope, remove a plastic cap, and drop a physical tape measure (a dip-tape) down the open hole until it hits water.

Why the "Unreliable" Excuse Defies the Laws of Physics

Because G-2 is a literal plastic pipe stuck in the mud, it cannot suffer from "electronic drift" or throw a "digital glitch." There are only two ways an open plastic standpipe can operate:

- **If the pipe fails or gets clogged:** Decades of clay and silt will choke the bottom openings of the pipe. Water is blocked from moving. The instrument becomes sluggish, dead, and static, showing almost no movement.
- **If the pipe is functioning perfectly:** The water level inside the plastic tube will rapidly rise and fall in direct, volatile sync with the real-world hydraulic pressure surrounding it.

The legally filed data shows that G-2 experienced a massive 9.72-foot vertical hydraulic surge from its historical baseline.

The Physics Fact: A manual plastic standpipe cannot be "hyper-reactive" and "broken" at the same time. The extreme volatility of G-2 is not evidence of instrument failure. It is evidence that the standpipe is responding to real, volatile hydraulic pressure inside the embankment — and those internal pressure changes directly correlate with visually expanding wet areas on the downstream surface of the dam.

3. The 2026 Data Omission and Remediation Failure

The timeline has now shifted from passive negligence to active concealment within the official regulatory reporting stream:

- **The Remediation Failure:** A million-dollar "seepage collection system modification" was recently implemented with the express purpose of "remediating" the expanding wet spots on the downstream slope. Below is a quote from the April 2024 Biennial Inspection Report (Geosyntec Document # GA240160):

"The area between Benches 1 and 2 was found to have localized areas that were wet and slightly soft. This area generally corresponds to the location of interceptor drains and may indicate damage to an interceptor drain, causing water to flow into the backfill around the pipe instead of flowing through the pipe into the concrete channel. The wet areas may be compounded by expected seasonal conditions during the wettest part of the year in the first calendar quarter; however, these areas will be remediated as part of the seepage collection system modification."

Despite this expenditure, **physical evidence** as shown in the April 2026 Biennial Inspection Report (Geosyntec Document # GA260091) **shows that the wet spots in the G-2 sector have actually grown dramatically in size.** The engineering fix failed.

- **The Omission of Data:** Furthermore, in the April 2026 Biennial Inspection Report data stream, rather than accounting for why the wet areas were still increasing, the data tracking was altered. The specific "G" series piezometer data points—the very data that would expose the failure—the Piezometer Data Tables—were completely omitted by Geosyntec—and **Griffin and Betsill inexplicably have allowed this to go unanswered,** despite all previous year (2020, 2022, and 2024) Biennial Inspection Reports containing this critical data set.

As wet areas expanded in direct conflict with the narrative of a successful remediation, the related Piezometer Data Tables were simply deleted from the record, and the EPD accepted the filing anyway.

4. The 25-Year Stability Contradiction

Engineering common sense dictates that earth-fill dams deteriorate over time. Yet, the regulatory record for Lake Petit Dam presents a sanitized, upward trajectory of safety that ignores the physical reality of a 50+ year-old structure. The Safe Dams Program has permitted a narrative where the dam strengthens through mathematical re-modeling rather than physical reinforcement.

5. Historical Flaws in Stability Reporting

The regulatory file confirms a pattern where failing grades were replaced with passing grades by adjusting the underlying modeling assumptions, rather than performing structural remediation.

Loading Condition	Required Minimum F.S.	JJ&G/Piedmont 1998 Baseline (Failure)	GeoSyntec 1998/99 Report (Passing)	2023/2024 Stability Report (Passing)
Steady-State (D/S)	1.5	1.28	1.52	1.6
Pseudostatic (Seismic)	1.1	0.75	1.46	1.5
Rapid Drawdown (U/S)	1.3	N/A	N/A	2.1

Note: The 1998 JJ&G/Piedmont data established a baseline of failure using real world data. The subsequent GeoSyntec and 2023 reports achieved "passing" grades through revised

modeling assumptions. Even if one were to completely throw out the data by exceptionally well qualified and industry recognized firms such as JJ&G/Piedmont as “incompetent”, or just “plain wrong”, you still are left to explain how in a 25 year time frame, the earthen Lake Petit Dam actually increased in Steady-State and Pseudostatic Stability numbers.

6. Regulatory Accountability: Griffin and Betsill

Safe Dams Program Manager David Griffin and Staff Engineer Kate Betsill are fully credentialed professionals. They know the foundational difference between an electronic sensor and a hollow plastic pipe. They know (or should know) that a hyper-reactive standpipe means active, shifting groundwater pressure, and they know that omitting an entire set of critical piezometer data during a period of expanding surface saturation is a massive regulatory red flag.

Yet, year after year, they have allowed Geosyntec filings to hide behind the claim that the G-2 "instrument" is "unreliable"—a claim that is a profound and deliberate deflection of the truth. There is no complex electronic mechanism inside that borehole to fail; it is a literal hollow plastic pipe. By treating a functioning manual standpipe like a potentially glitching piece of software, Griffin and Betsill have rubber-stamped an outright deception. They have permitted the dam owner to mask a severe, localized hydraulic surge as a mere equipment malfunction, and have now allowed the data to be scrubbed entirely from the 2026 record to complete the cover-up.

The same regulatory pattern appears in the stability reporting. While the early GeoSyntec stability models from the late 1990s were never formally approved as the calculation of record by the SDP, the current administration has allowed these legacy modeling methodologies to persist. Griffin and Betsill are responsible for the following recent regulatory failures:

- **Validation of Unproven Methodologies:** Under their oversight, the SDP has allowed the permit application process to move forward based on updated stability factors that continue to suggest the dam is "improving" without addressing the fact that the original, failed stability factors from 1998 were never properly remediated.
- **Acceptance of Theory Over Physical Reality:** They have overseen a process that accepts high safety factors on paper (1.6 for steady-state) while the dam demonstrates active, increasing distress, including localized wet areas and hydraulic surges.
- **Regulatory Deferral:** They have allowed the project to continue in a state of regulatory limbo, where the dam owner utilizes updated stability modeling to satisfy permit requirements, while the physical structural issues of the dam remain largely unaddressed through the necessary heavy-scale reinforcement originally identified as mandatory by the state in 1998.

By validating these filings, Griffin and Betsill are not operating as objective public safety enforcers. They are providing bureaucratic cover for a model-based compliance narrative that ignores the aging reality of the structure, minimizes active hydraulic warning signs, and prioritizes mathematical convenience over geotechnical truth. The result is not harmless

paperwork; it is the regulatory concealment of an active, verified structural issue at the direct risk of downstream human life.

7. The Larger Regulatory Pattern

Taken together, these facts show a single pattern: the Safe Dams Program has repeatedly accepted paper narratives that contradict physical reality.

First, a volatile manual standpipe was treated as if it were an unreliable electronic instrument, even though the “unreliable” explanation defies the basic physical reality of how an open standpipe works.

Second, when the wet areas expanded after a costly seepage remediation project, the specific G-series piezometer data needed to evaluate the failure was omitted from the 2026 reporting stream, and the omission was accepted.

Third, the dam’s stability record shows the same basic pattern over a longer timeline: physical aging and observed distress on the dam are countered not by major structural reinforcement, but by revised models and improved paper safety factors.

This is the regulatory failure now requiring immediate outside investigation. The question is no longer whether one report contained one questionable statement. The question is **why the Safe Dams Program has allowed a Category I high-hazard dam to remain under a compliance narrative where physical warning signs are repeatedly explained away, modeled away, or omitted from the record altogether.**

Formal Demands for Action

We demand that the Governor’s Office and Leadership of the DNR immediately intervene to order:

1. **An Immediate Suspension of Approvals:** Halt the acceptance of all Geosyntec compliance updates, permit applications, stability filings, and related compliance approvals regarding Lake Petit Dam pending a forensic review of the omitted 2026 G-series data, the expanding wet areas, and the stability modeling history.
2. **Mandatory Emergency Drawdown:** Immediately institute a controlled drawdown of Lake Petit to a level that mitigates hydraulic pressure on the embankment, pending the results of an independent forensic audit. This is a standard and necessary precautionary measure for a high-hazard structure demonstrating active hydraulic distress indicators, expanding wet and soft areas, and anomalous internal hydraulic pressure behavior.
3. **Independent Seismic and Stability Forensic Audit:** Appoint an out-of-state, independent engineering firm with no ties to Geosyntec, the dam owner, or any firms previously involved in the development of the existing “passing” models to physically audit the downstream toe, the expanding wet areas, the G-2 vertical surge metrics, the prior seepage remediation work, and the dam’s seismic and slope stability using actual

observed field conditions, piezometer data, drain performance records, and documented hydraulic behavior — not merely “calibrated” model data provided by consultants.

4. **Internal OIG Investigation:** Initiate a formal Office of Inspector General review into the Watershed Protection Branch of the EPD—specifically focusing on David Griffin and Kate Betsill—to determine why obvious technical deceptions, omitted hydraulic data, report-altering practices, and modeling methodologies that contradict the dam's physical deterioration have been permitted to bypass regulatory scrutiny for years.


The state cannot afford to ignore a 25-year compliance record in which an aging earthen dam with expanding wet-area indicators, documented hydraulic anomalies, and unresolved seepage-related history is portrayed as increasingly stable on paper without the physical reinforcement necessary to justify that conclusion.

Ultimately, this is not an ordinary structure; Lake Petit Dam is the second-largest earthen dam in the State of Georgia. As a Category I, high-hazard structure, a breach would result in catastrophic loss of life and unacceptable damage to regional infrastructure and the local economy. Relying on theoretical modeling that diverges from the dam's physical behavior is not merely a bureaucratic failure—it is a dangerous disregard for the measurable reality of the structure's condition.

The physical evidence, the omitted data, the failed remediation, and the structurally impossible paper safety trend are already part of the record. I maintain a supporting public record at LakePetitDam.com, which documents more than 50 years of engineering reports, documented problems, and regulatory noncompliance involving this dam.

I request a written response within fifteen (15) business days confirming receipt of this complaint and detailing the specific actions the Governor's Office, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Environmental Protection Division intend to take in response to each of the demands set forth above.

Respectfully submitted,

 6-16-26

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