

Georgia Claims a Sliver of the Tennessee River

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ATLANTA — *WHEREAS*, in 1818 when the border between [Georgia](#) and [Tennessee](#) was marked by surveyors, mistakes were made that deprived Georgia of a sliver of the Tennessee River.



John Bazemore/Associated Press Jerry Body, a Georgia resident, walked past a marker in Cole City Hollow, Tenn., indicating the state lines of Alabama, Georgia and Tennessee.

WHEREAS, Georgia's water supply is now threatened by a severe drought.

WHEREAS, Georgia lawmakers on Wednesday passed a resolution to restore the boundary line to its appropriate latitude, notwithstanding skepticism all around and outright insults from their neighbors to the north.

And *WHEREAS* the concept of a war between states is not foreign to these parts,

BE IT OBSERVED that the Georgia legislature appears to be serious.

"The resolution before you does not move our boundary," State Senator David J. Shafer, the Republican sponsor of the resolution, told his colleagues before they voted unanimously in favor of it. "It does not need to be moved. If you open the Georgia code you will see that Georgia law to this day defines our northern border as the 35th Parallel."

A parallel that just happens to run through the middle of a bend in the Tennessee River, unlike the current boundary, which is below it.

Mayor Ron Littlefield of Chattanooga, Tenn., said he was disappointed that Mr. Shafer did not seem to be having the fun that the mayor sees as one of the joys of Southern politics. "I saw him grumbling that we didn't seem to be taking it seriously," Mr. Littlefield said. "Well, I'm sorry, we're not."

Mr. Shafer shrugged off responses by various Tennessee officials who have called the resolution absurd, laughable, crazy and idiotic. "They've responded with jokes and catcalls because they simply don't have any legitimate arguments to make," he said.

Mr. Shafer's stance does have a basis in the words of Congress, which in 1796 created the state of Tennessee and set the 35th parallel as its southern border.

But a few years later, the surveyors hired by the two states to mark the line were using tables rife with typos and equipment that was antiquated even at the time, according to C. Barton Crattie, a land surveyor and board member of the Surveyors Historical Society, who lives in Georgia. It was a surveyor hired by Georgia, in fact, who "fruitlessly begged the governor to allocate decent, state-of-the-art surveying instruments," Mr. Crattie wrote in an article on the Web site of *The American Surveyor* magazine.

The cornerstone marking the juncture of Alabama, Georgia and Tennessee was placed more than a mile south of the intended latitude.

Tennessee specifically cited the survey findings in state law. But Georgia never ratified them, and made attempts to resolve the discrepancy in the 1880s, the 1940s and again in the 1970s, to no avail.

The latest effort to redraw — er, correct — the boundary line comes as Georgia fights over water rights with its neighbors, who complain that the state has done little to encourage conservation or to rein in growth. Atlanta depends almost solely on Lake Lanier and the Chattahoochee River for its water, while the much larger Tennessee River flows just out of reach on the other side of the state line.

North Georgians have already begun to envision a new water-treatment plant and pipeline from the Tennessee River to Atlanta, although any withdrawal would have to be approved by the Tennessee Valley Authority even if Georgia does suddenly acquire riverfront property.

If the resolution passed this week by both houses is signed by Gov. [Sonny Perdue](#), it would establish a boundary-line commission and ask Tennessee and North Carolina to do the same. Should that fail, Georgia could file suit in the [United States Supreme Court](#) — which is still deciding a similar dispute between the Carolinas.

Brenda Goodman contributed reporting.