

Northern Beltline: A Major Threat to our Waterways

- ALDOT is pursuing the longest and most environmentally destructive of the seven routes considered according to the EPA's 1997 Environmental Impact Statement.
- The highway will cross and permanently alter Black Warrior and Cahaba river streams and wetlands in 125 places (including impacts to two major sources of drinking water - for Birmingham on the Cahaba River & for Bessemer on the Black Warrior River, and one minor source for Bradford on Self Creek), 90 of which are in the Black Warrior River basin.
- Almost 90% of the Beltline corridor is undeveloped and the majority of the interstate will go through forested lands. 4,050 acres (the equivalent of over 3,000 football fields) of forest will be destroyed.
- During construction, the Beltline will cause significant forest and wildlife habitat destruction and muddy water runoff into wetlands and streams during rain events.
- Most streams in the Beltline's path will be put into concrete culverts, without natural streambeds or any sunlight, so the highway can be built on top of them. Culverts destroy habitat, create migratory impediments for aquatic life, and facilitate increased stream flow velocities and downstream bank erosion.
- Inadequate environmental impact studies have been performed to assess the true harm that will be caused by the Beltline, which violates the National Environmental Policy Act.
- Rare and endangered aquatic and terrestrial species in the path of the Beltline have not been adequately studied or considered for protection from immediate and upstream impacts.
- Since 1997, at least eight species newly listed as endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act are located in the vicinity of the Northern Beltline.
- The Beltline will impact the Turkey Creek watershed, which contains 13 miles of federally designated critical habitat for the endangered vermilion darter, a species of fish that exists in Turkey Creek and nowhere else in the world.
- A rare and isolated population of the imperiled eastern hemlock grows along the banks of Village Creek downstream of Bayview Lake dam, where the Beltline plans to cross the creek.
- Numerous streams in both the Black Warrior and Cahaba River basins have experienced worsening water quality over the years since the original 1997 Environmental Impact Study was done. Since the 1997 EIS, 40 streams in the project area have been listed on Alabama's 303(d) List of impaired waters.
- Floodplains mapped by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that will be crossed or encroached upon by the Northern Beltline have increased from 14 in 1997 to 54 in 2012.
- Post-construction Indirect and Cumulative impacts have not been adequately studied.
- Any secondary development that occurs after the Beltline is built will have associated impacts to the environment, such as increased rain runoff volumes and velocities (which lead to increased flooding) from building roofs, parking lots, and streets, and increased pollutant runoff, such as oil and grease, sediment, fertilizers, and trash.
- Jefferson County just exited its recent municipal bankruptcy, a fiasco that began with mismanagement of contracts for long overdue sewer collection line repairs and unnecessary extensions. The county's sewage treatment plants have been updated but their collection lines are still in disrepair. Crumbling sewer lines still allow millions of gallons of raw sewage overflows to streams and creeks throughout Jefferson County every year. Any additional development in the vicinity of the Northern Beltline would require adding costly new sewer line infrastructure onto an already overburdened system in need of repair, leading to even more raw sewage overflows to streams and creeks near where people fish, swim, and recreate.