



Georgia's 2020

CLEAN WATER HEROES

Yonah Mountain Vineyards

GEORGIA'S RIVERS

White County Vineyard Becomes Wine, Solar Destination

INTRODUCTION:

In 2005, when the Miller family purchased some 200 acres of land in White County with Yonah Mountain as a scenic backdrop, they intended to “harvest” sunlight to grow grapes and make wine. Now, 15 years later, they’re not only excelling at growing grapes and producing award-winning wines, they’re also harvesting the sun to provide much of their power needs. In 2019, Yonah Mountain Vineyards installed a 360-panel, \$238,000 solar array that now meets more than half the business’s electricity needs and serves as a model for others looking to invest in clean energy.

THE WATER BODY:

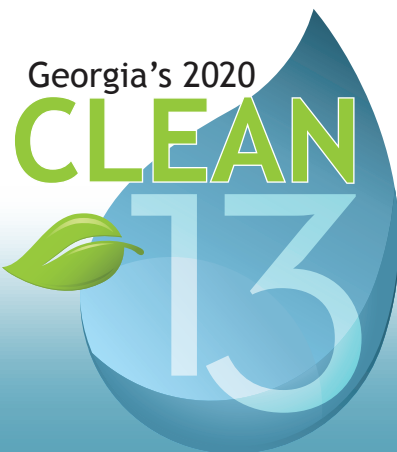
Georgia’s rivers make power. At the state’s coal, gas and nuclear power plants, water withdrawn from the Chattahoochee, Coosa, Etowah, Savannah, Altamaha and Ocmulgee rivers serves as cooling water in the steam-driven power generation process. In fact, thermoelectric power plants are the largest users of water in Georgia, demanding more than two billion gallons a day. While these water withdrawals stress river systems on the supply side, power plants’ warm water discharges and toxins leading from coal ash ponds can harm the health of the rivers and aquatic wildlife. Meanwhile air emissions, especially from coal-fired power plants, contain tons of climate-warming greenhouse gases. Mercury is also released in these emissions and ultimately falls back to the ground. Once introduced to the environment, it enters the aquatic food chain, tainting the fish we eat with the toxin. Against these pollution problems and the growing demand for water for municipal supplies, clean energy like solar is playing an increasingly important role in protecting water resources.

THE CLEAN:

Georgia’s solar energy industry is booming. Across the state, more than 2,600 MW of solar panels are in operation, ranking the state 9th in total solar installed. That’s enough electricity to power more than 300,000 homes. The boom in solar is due in part to the falling cost of installation—a 38 percent drop in the last five years.



YONAH MOUNTAIN
VINEYARDS





The Miller family of Yonah Mountain Vineyards is among those riding the wave of lower costs for clean energy. While their array helps eliminate impacts to the state's rivers and reduce climate-warming pollutants, the installation is also a financial windfall. They expect to recoup their nearly quarter-million-dollar investment in utility bill savings within eight years.

"We know climate change is happening; we know it is real. So, there was no reason not to build the vineyard facilities so that it would help the planet," said Eric Miller, general manager and the son of founders, Bob and Jane Miller.

The vineyard's efforts at promoting clean energy don't end with their solar array. The White County facility is also home to the largest Tesla Destination Charging location in North Georgia, offering 14 plug-in stations for electric vehicles, including some that are fed by the solar installation.

But solar is just part of the vineyard's sustainability portfolio. Energy-efficient lighting in facilities, a partnership with the Georgia Beekeeping Association that maintains a bee farm on site, a bottle recycling program and a conservation easement to preserve the property are among the other practices the Miller family has employed.

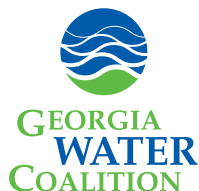
With Georgia's wine and solar industries simultaneously experiencing tremendous growth, the Millers now find themselves as advocates for both. A year after the install, the wine experts are not just sommoliers; they are sommoliers of solar.

Said Miller: "The quickest way to get people on board with solar is to talk about the financial incentives. If they don't care about the planet they do care about the money."

But, there's still room for growth. Though expanding rapidly, solar power provides less than three percent of Georgia's total electricity.



Top: Yonah Mountain Vineyards produces its wine using grapes grown on about 20 acres. Solar panels occupy a half acre nearby and provide a large portion of the business's electricity needs. Top left: The wine cave at Yonah Mountain Vineyards is lighted using power generated from the business's 360-panel solar array. Above: The distinctive profile of Yonah Mountain looms over the solar array at Yonah Mountain Vineyards. The 360-panel solar array installed in 2019 is expected to pay for itself in utility bill savings within eight years.



For More Information Contact:

Eric Miller, General Manager, Yonah Mountain Vineyards,
706-878-5522, eric@yonahmountainvineyards.com