

Alabama Power – Coal Ash & RSA Alabama's Environmental Bomb

BY DAVID G. BRONNER

We should all be proud of the economic growth of Alabama over the last four decades. Make no mistake, Alabama Power has played the critical role in recruiting Mercedes, Airbus, and many other manufacturers to Alabama. The RSA's support of Southern Company (Alabama Power's parent company) dates back to 1975, when the RSA purchased a seven-year bond for \$43.6 million at 11.5% (about \$301 million in today's dollars). Southern Company was facing bankruptcy due to problems with costs at its Georgia nuclear plant.

In 2022, a group called Mobile Baykeepers (mobilebaykeeper.org/coal-ash/) filed a lawsuit against Alabama Power over its Barry Ash Pond, estimated at 21 million cubic yards of toxic coal ash. The federal district court dismissed the case, but an appeal was filed. Last month the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals overturned that dismissal.

Why is that important to the entire state and the RSA, you ask? The RSA has substantial investments in both Baldwin and Mobile counties. The RSA has spent decades changing tourism from a \$1.3 billion industry to a \$25 billion industry for our state. Clearly, a breach of the toxic pond would turn the Mobile Bay into a

toxic, arsenic wasteland – hurting Alabama tourism and hindering our import/export docks even more than when the B.P. oil spill happened on our beaches. You might hope and pray that a breach in the ash pond never happens, but unfortunately this same thing has happened in Kingston, TN, and Dan River, NC. At the



much smaller Tennessee site, 30 clean-up workers died, while over 250 other workers became chronically ill.

Alabamians know the reality of hurricane damage, and May's possible terrorism with the Mobile water supply. Yet, with forecasts of eight to fourteen named storms this season, we need to avoid the additional danger of adding to an already potentially deadly storm with the Mobile

Bay ash ending up in the delta.

Delaying any solution until the bomb blows up is not a solution. Coal ash has and will kill people and forever damage the second-largest delta in America.

Remember, Alabama Power followed the rules when they built the Barry site – they HAD to follow the rules in order to build it. No one can build a home without a building permit, much less a huge plant! After following the rules, Biden's regulations correctly changed those rules to control other ash pond breaches that resulted in death and destruction.

Correcting the Barry site time bomb will cost about \$4 billion, and waiting means higher costs and unnecessary risks to Alabama's future. Alabama Power is not a bad actor that intentionally or negligently pollutes. They followed the rules; the rules changed; therefore, the state and federal governments should fund their share of correcting this critical problem for all of Alabama.

The Barry Ash Pond is not only an Alabama Power issue but also a statewide problem that must be corrected before a breach occurs in Mobile. ●

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CONTINUED ON PAGE TWO

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continued from page one

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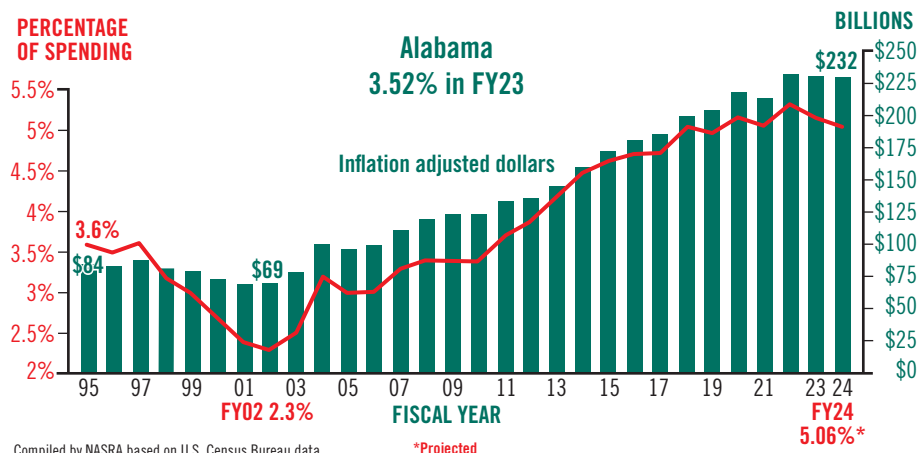
State and Local Government Spending on Public Employee Retirement Systems

Percentage of spending declined in FY23

SOURCE: NASRA, [NASRA.ORG](https://nasra.org)

State and local government pension benefits are paid not from general operating revenues but from trust funds to which state and local government retirees and their employers contribute during employees' working years. These trusts pay over \$400 billion annually to retirees and their beneficiaries, benefits that reach virtually every city and town in the nation. On a nationwide basis, contributions made in FY23 by state and local governments to pension trust funds accounted for 5.16 percent of direct general spending. Pension spending levels, however, vary widely among states, depending on various factors, and are actuarially sufficient for some pension plans and insufficient for others.

State and local pension contributions, in 2024 dollars, and as a percentage of state and local direct general spending, 1994–2024*



INVESTMENTS AND OTHER PARTS OF THE FINANCING EQUATION

As mentioned previously, the largest portion of public pension funding – nearly 60 percent for the 30-year period 1995–2024 – comes from investment earnings, which illustrates the major role this revenue source plays in determining pension costs (see NASRA Issue Brief: Public Pension Plan Investment Return Assumptions, June 2025).

In addition to the performance of pension fund investments, actuarial expectations regarding macroeconomic and demographic events also affect the cost of the plan. These events include the rate of inflation, retirement rates, attrition and rates of hiring, and wage growth, which can be affected by salary cuts and layoffs. Additionally, over the last 15 years, legislatures in nearly every state made changes to pension benefits and/or financing structures, in some cases reducing plan costs and long-term obligations. ●



Alabama Success Story

Alabama Expands Outdoor Recreation Options To Grow the Economy

SOURCE: ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES
OUTDOORALABAMA.COM

When individuals and families are deciding where to live, one of the first questions they ask is simple: *What is the quality of life?* And a major part of that answer is access to outdoor recreation. People want to know if they can bike on scenic trails, paddle down clean rivers, hike through preserved lands, camp at beautiful state parks, or spend weekends hunting and fishing. They want to live in places that allow them to unplug, recharge, and connect with nature.

From the Tennessee Valley, through the River Region, Southern Appalachians, and the Black Belt, through the Wiregrass, to the white sandy beaches of the Gulf Coast, and everything in between, our state is second to none in the country when it comes to beautiful outdoors and recreational opportunities. But Alabama's natural beauty is about more than just recreation. It is a powerful economic asset – and one that is increasingly central to our state's ability to compete for talent in a rapidly changing economy.

In 2019, with this in mind, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) embarked on an aggressive Outdoor Recreation Expansion and Enhancement Program. Led by Conservation Commissioner Chris Blankenship, this comprehensive program was designed to enhance our outdoor recreation offerings and expand access to take advantage of what we have been blessed with here in Alabama.

ADCNR has invested more than \$525 million in outdoor recreation improvements in Alabama. This includes more than \$350 million in Alabama State Park enhancements, such as new lodge hotels at Gulf State Park and Cheaha State Park; renovated campgrounds at many parks; new accessible playgrounds; new and refurbished cabins and cottages; upgraded day-use areas and golf course improvements; more than 100 miles of new hiking, biking, and kayak trails; and more than \$76 million in beach renourishment and beach access enhancements.

They invested more than \$66 million

in 50-plus boating access improvement projects, including tournament-size boat ramps with adequate parking at multiple sites. They have created 9 new artificial reef zones and built more than 1,000 artificial reefs in the Gulf of America. They



have expanded the red snapper season from 3 days under federal management to almost 200 days under state management and upgraded several State Public Fishing Lakes. These and other improvements are making Alabama one of the top destinations for outdoor recreation in the country.

As our state flourishes and more

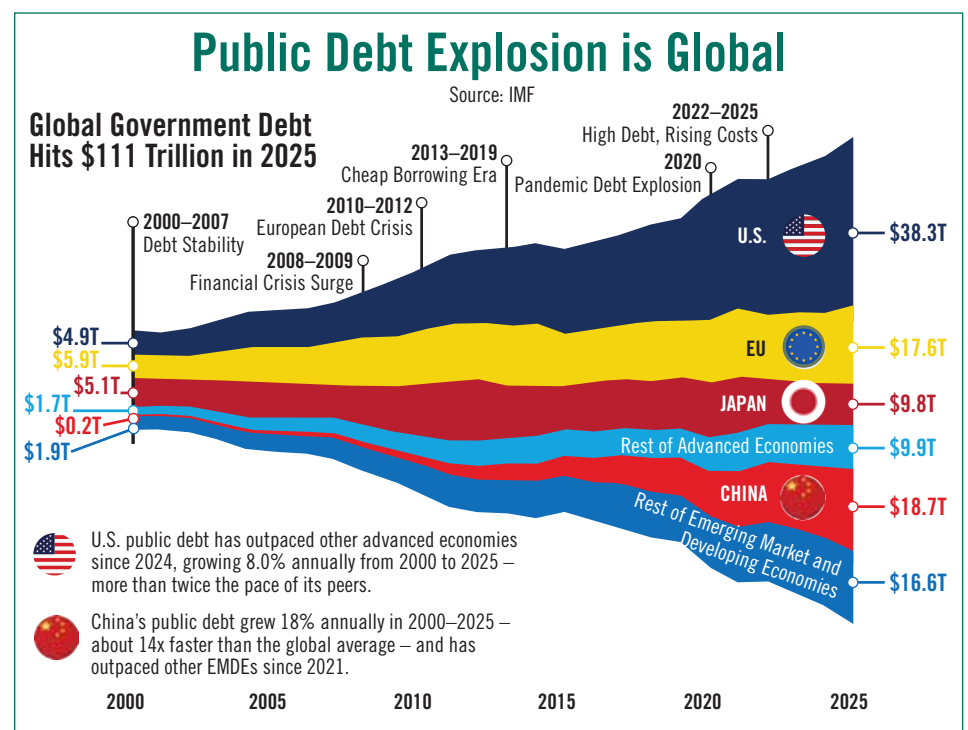
people move here to live and work, it is important to provide ample public lands for them to enjoy. Since 2017, ADCNR has partnered with several groups and agencies to acquire more than 105,000 acres of land in Alabama for public access at State

Parks, State Forests, Wildlife Management Areas, waterfront parks, and Forever Wild lands. Those acres protect sensitive coastal habitats, mitigate impacts to endangered species, provide waterfront access to citizens and visitors, and secure public hunting and fishing opportunities in all parts of the state.

Alabama's great outdoors are more than a point of pride. They are a competitive advantage. And if we continue to lean into that advantage, we will ensure that our state remains not only a beautiful place to visit,

but one of the best places in the country to live, work, and raise a family.

This is a series of articles about Alabama Success Stories. Please let us know if you have a similar success story you would like to share with the RSA membership. You may contact us at communication.correspondences@rsa-al.gov.



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• September N/A due to Renovation

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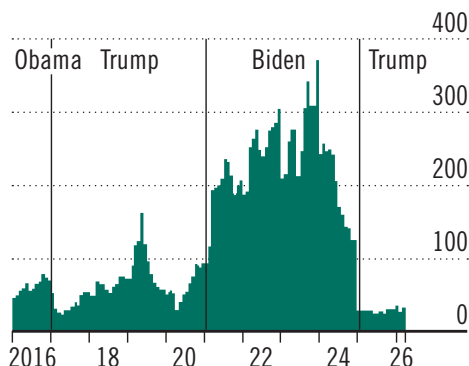
The *Advisor* is available online at www.rsa-al.gov/about-rsa/publications/advisor/.



The U.S. Border

Bordering on sealed

United States, monthly migrant encounters*, '000



*From March 2020 to May 2023 monthly encounters include apprehensions and expulsions. Other dates are apprehensions only.
Source: US Customs and Border Protection



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