

Hunting rights measure on ballot

Urban vs. rural fight seen

By Ruth Finch Staff Writer

State Sen. Jeff Mullis, R-Chickamauga, said it wasn't a threat from anti-hunting groups that led him to sign on as co-sponsor of a bill that would amend the Georgia Constitution to protect hunting and fishing rights.

It was suburbia.

"The majority of the House of Representatives and the Senate is now composed of people who represent suburban or urban areas," Sen. Mullis said. "We believe rural Georgia could lose some of these issues."

Amending the state constitution to require the preservation of hunting and fishing traditions will mean that future, more urban-leaning legislatures would not be able to take those rights away without a two-thirds majority in the Legislature and a simple majority of statewide voters.

Voters will have a chance to vote on adding hunting and fishing rights to the state constitution on Nov. 7. As Atlanta's suburbs expand, Georgians can expect more conflicts between rural and urban constituencies, said Dr. Charles Bullock, a political science professor at the University of Georgia.

"I anticipate growing battles over water," Dr. Bullock said. "With Atlanta saying, 'We need more to drink' and South Georgia farmers saying, 'How are we going to water our crops?'" He also forecasts more battles over funding for some vocational education programs used primarily by rural students and over transportation.

"If you put this stuff to a vote, the urban folks can outvote the rural folks easily," Dr. Bullock said.

With nearly 5 million people, according to a 2005 U.S. Census estimate, Atlanta is the ninth-largest metro area in the nation and contains more than half of the state's 9 million people, Dr. Bullock said.

"We see a threat coming down the road," Sen. Mullis said.

And it's not just about hunting rights.

"There are lots of rules that might make sense in a densely populated area that make no sense in our rural areas," said Rep. Martin Scott, R-Rossville. "When you pass a state law, you can't make it county specific. Our fear is that we will lose the ability to protect our rights."