



Georgia Water Planning

Meeting Summary

Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water Council Meeting

Columbus Water Works– Columbus, Georgia

February 4, 2020

Welcome & Introductions

Kristin Rowles (Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center) started the meeting by welcoming the Council members and attendees to the meeting. She asked each person to introduce themselves. Steve Davis, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and emphasized the importance to the Council of input from stakeholders in the region. Kristin then reviewed the meeting agenda and presented members a list of candidates for potential appointment to the Council. Matt Windom noted that Robert York should be listed as residing in Haralson County.

Updates from GAEPD

Christine Voudy (GAEPD) gave a report on several topics including the regional water planning process, the FL v GA case, and the recently lifted drought declaration (slides available.) She discussed the next round of regional water planning, water demand forecasts, and the surface and ground water resource assessments. Christine discussed the development of technical work products to support planning. She said that the schedule for the next planning cycle will be released by GAEPD in March. Council review of these materials is starting this year. She explained that for the surface water availability resource assessment, a pilot project in the Oconee-Ocmulgee-Altamaha Basin is underway to develop a new model that will provide much greater resolution than the previous model. It is expected that this pilot project will be expanded to the rest of the state. Responding to questions from the Council, Christine reported that Hazen & Sawyer was the contractor completing the pilot project. She also clarified that the updated surface water availability model will include many more nodes than the previous version.

Ms. Voudy next updated the Council on the ongoing Florida v. Georgia Supreme Court litigation. A hearing in front of Special Master Paul Kelly was held in November 2019, and the Special Master released his recommendation to the Supreme Court in December 2019. It was noted in discussion

that the Supreme Court has set a briefing schedule on this case, but oral arguments are not anticipated to occur until the Court's 2020-2021 term that begins in October and runs through June 2021.

Ms. Voudy then provided a summary of GA EPD's drought response declaration process. She reported that a significant portion of the state was under Drought Response Level 1 last fall. Five variance requests were approved by GA EPD for Drought Response Level 2. The drought declaration was lifted on December 27, 2019 and the variances expired on December 31, 2019.

Ms. Voudy discussed the water audit requirements, including the upcoming deadline for submission to GA EPD. She advised that all water audit information is published on the GA EPD website and available for review. GA EPD will be looking for utilities to have set individual system goals, to have developed a water loss control program, and to be making progress against goals.

Metro Water District Planning Update

Danny Johnson (Metro North Georgia Water Planning District) reported on a formal request from Coweta County to increase their withdraw of water from the Chattahoochee River. He noted that the District's Executive Committee has determined that the request would result in a "major amendment" to the District's plan. The District is in the process of gathering additional information related to the request and will notify the Council when the request is open for 30-day public comment period. Mr. Johnson also provided the Council an update on the District's planning process and timeline. The District recently released an RFP for consultant services to support plan update development. Danny reported that priorities for the upcoming round will include biosolids management, drought response and resiliency, impacts of septic systems on surface water quality and quantity, and cost-benefit analysis. He referred to a dry weather septic system study that the District recently completed. This report will be shared with Council members. The District would like to extend this study to wet weather conditions. In response to a question about Forsyth County, he said that new development there is generally being serviced by centralized sewer system expansion and not septic systems. In response to another comment about consumptive water use, Danny said that the District would like to improve the data it has on ridgeline transfers of water in the District. The District looks forward to coordinating with the Middle Chattahoochee Council in development of their respective plans and will remain engaged throughout the review and revision process.

LUNCH BREAK

Population Projections

Steve Simpson (Black & Veatch) summarized recently completed population projections that will inform the development of the municipal and industrial water demand forecasts for the next round of planning (slides available). The projections were completed by the Carl Vinson School of Government at the University of Georgia. Yearly projections were completed for years 2017 to 2035, and five-year increment projections were completed out to 2062. The overall statewide population is projected to increase while the population of the Middle Chattahoochee Council region is projected to hold approximately steady (with relatively minor increases). Steve noted that most of the growth in the state is projected in urban areas. One Council member questioned the decline in the population projections for Muscogee County. He noted that Muscogee County population trends are driven in large part by Ft. Benning, and a decrease of the scale projected is not anticipated. If the Muscogee population does not decrease at the rate shown in the projections, the implications for planning are significant given the relative size of this county's population in this region. Another Council member said that Harris County projections should also be reviewed for similar reasons. GA EPD will ask the demographers to review the Muscogee and Harris County population projections and respond to the questions raised.

Steve noted the importance of the population projections in estimating water withdrawals and wastewater return estimates for the region. A Council member asked if Alabama water use is considered in the Council's plan. Steve said that Alabama water use forecasts are included in the surface water availability resource assessment. He noted that information available on Alabama water use has improved since the first round of planning by the Council.

Groundwater Resource Assessment Updates

Dr. Jim Kennedy (GAEPD) provided the Council an overview of recently completed groundwater assessments related to the Middle Chattahoochee Council region (slides available). Dr. Kennedy noted that this modeling involved a tighter grid spacing (a more refined model) and improved data on agricultural water use beyond modeling done to support the last round of regional water planning. Dr. Kennedy noted that there are over 4.6 million grids in the new transient model which provide an improved representation of groundwater impacts throughout the planning area as compared to the models used in previous planning cycles. The modeling simulations suggest that increased groundwater pumping may be available from the lower portions of the Cretaceous aquifer without impacting surface water flows, but the simulations also show more than 30 feet of drawdown during the growing season in portions of the Council region. Dr. Kennedy also noted concern over potential "mining" of groundwater based on simulations of sustained increased pumping in the Cretaceous aquifer. Dr. Kennedy also suggested additional water quality

monitoring should be completed before developing new withdrawals in the Cretaceous. Discussion of the groundwater modeling addressed the following:

- An observer commented that it has been suggested that the Middle Chattahoochee River is a “losing reach.” Dr. Kennedy said that the work presented does not directly address that issue.
- Responding to a Council member question, Dr. Kennedy noted that a pilot study of aquifer storage and recovery was conducted in southwest GA, but the results were not conclusive as there were difficulties in obtaining adequate yield from the pilot study well drilled. He said that the conditions that would support aquifer storage and recovery are very location specific and any future potential sites should be thoroughly studied.
- A Council member asked if the model results support a continued moratorium on new withdrawals from the Clayton Aquifer. Dr. Kennedy responded that this modeling work did not address that question. Dr. Kennedy acknowledged that Clayton aquifer wells are permitted nearby in Alabama. He noted that the cone of influence for the Clayton is small – probably about five miles. Therefore, pumping of the Clayton aquifer in Alabama would probably not affect aquifer levels in southwest Georgia significantly. The Georgia moratorium is based on localized impacts.
- In response to a question, Dr. Kennedy said that the Clayton Aquifer is recharged throughout its range from other aquifers as well as in outcrop areas.
- Council members commented that the costs of using deep aquifers may be cost prohibitive.

Harmful Algal Blooms and Invasive Aquatic Plants in Georgia: Monitoring, Risk and Mitigation

Susan Wilde (UGA) presented research related to algal blooms and invasive aquatic plants in Middle Chattahoochee reservoirs (slides available). She focused on her research on *Aetokthonos hydrillicola*, a cyanobacteria that grows on hydrilla and has been observed to cause the death of eagles. She noted that cyanobacteria blooms are supported by warm temperatures, turbidity, nutrients, and slow-moving water. Cyanobacteria can have harmful impacts on health, biodiversity, and recreation. She said that Lake Walter F. George is the only place in the Chattahoochee Basin where she has observed *Aetokthonos*. Discussion of her presentation addressed the following:

- Hydrilla is not present in significant quantities in Lakes Lanier, Oliver, and Goat Rock.
- Lake Harding has hydrilla but *Aetokthonos hydrillicola* has not been found.
- Lake Walter F. George has lots of hydrilla. *Aetokthonos* has been observed there in one location.
- Vegetative buffers can help to address conditions that support hydrilla and cyanobacteria.

- Another practice that might be helpful is filling gullies and ditches with woody debris during timber harvesting.
- The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA DNR) takes samples of algal blooms and maintains a website that addresses harmful algal blooms. The website describes a simple jar test that citizens can conduct to determine the presence of cyanobacteria.
- Hydrilla control can be provided with herbicides or sterile triploid grass carp. Some hydrilla has become resistant to herbicides. Grass carp seem to be effective, but the right stocking rate is needed to prevent harm to beneficial plant populations.
- Phosphorus loading can occur when sediments get resuspended. The Middle Chattahoochee region has high levels of sediment in its floodplains that may be a source of phosphorus. Erosion control can help to control hydrilla populations.

Chattahoochee Riverkeeper Report: Filling the Water Gap

Chris Manganiello (Chattahoochee Riverkeeper) presented an overview of trends in water use from the Chattahoochee and Flint Basins as well as key findings from their recently completed report *Filling the Water Gap: Conservation Successes and Opportunities for Communities that Depend on the Chattahoochee River (slides available)*. Chris discussed water audit results, which are one focus of the report. Members will be provided a link to the full report. In discussion, Council members noted that water loss audit validity results in the range of 70-85 are quite good. GA EPD also offered that validity scores are just one part of information reviewed in the permit renewal process. GA EPD also noted that water audit results are not compared across utilities but used to evaluate progress within a utility over time. Council members also discussed the impact of conservation pricing in terms of water conservation and revenue. It was noted that the impact of increasing block pricing on water use and revenue can be quite varied and dependent on local conditions and rates.

Review of Council Member Survey Results

Next, Kristin reviewed the results of a recently completed Council-member survey (slides available). The survey was conducted as a part of an effort by GA EPD and the regional water planning contractors to gather input on the regional water planning process. A total of five surveys were completed by Middle Chattahoochee Council members. Kristin noted that several of the topics raised in the survey were addressed during today's meeting, and she said that the remainder of the survey results will be used in planning future Council meetings.

Kristin mentioned that the council website is currently being updated, and contains a link to a short video on regional water planning, including interviews with MCH council members.

Public Comment

Laura Schneider (River Valley Regional Commission) gave the Council an update on the Commission’s seed grant on the Long Cane Creek watershed related to DNA marker and water quality monitoring. The Commission is in the process of preparing a draft watershed plan for GA EPD to review and will be scheduling a public meeting soon.

Next Steps

Kristin said that the Council’s meeting schedule would be determined soon based on the forthcoming schedule for the next planning cycle from GA EPD. She reminded the Council of resources available to help in outreach and education efforts including Power Point slides, fact sheets, a video about the Council, and the new Regional Water Planning website (<https://waterplanning.georgia.gov>). She asked Council members to think about other potential audiences for outreach presentations. She noted that members of the planning contractor support team are available to attend meetings with Council members to assist in outreach efforts. Steve Davis, Chair, thanked everyone for their participation and contributions and noted the importance of the input received. The meeting was adjourned.

Council Members Attending February 4, 2020 Meeting

Steve Davis, Chair	Matt Windom
Harry Lange, Vice Chair	James Emery
Jimmy Thompson	Ken Penuel
Gardiner Garrard	

Other Attendees

Christine Voudy, GA EPD	Susan Wilde, UGA
Jennifer Welte, GA EPD	Wesley Gerrin, UGA
Jim Kennedy, GA EPD	Danny Johnson, Metro Water District
Steve Simpson, Black & Veatch	Laura Schneider, River Valley Regional Commission
Katherine Hammock, Black & Veatch	
Chris Manganiello, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper	Brent Hess, GADNR
George Martin, Georgia Power	Kristin Rowles, GWPPC
	Mark Masters, GWPPC