



Georgia Water Planning

Meeting Summary

Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Regional Water Council Meeting

Albany State University – Albany, GA

November 5, 2021

Welcome & Introductions

Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Chair Richard Royal started the meeting with a remembrance of Council Member Jimmy Champion, who recently passed away. Chairman Royal welcomed members and thanked everyone for their attendance. Next, the members interviewed each other and then introduced each other to the group.

Orientation to Regional Water Planning

Steve Simpson (Black & Veatch) presented a member orientation that reviewed the regional water planning process and specific material related to this Council's planning work. Note that slides for all presentations in this meeting are posted on the Council website.

Discussion:

- A Council member asked about whether the Council will be meeting with neighboring Councils. Steve noted that this Council has done that in prior planning cycles and can plan to do that again in this planning cycle. Steve also pointed out that there are "joint recommendations" from all three Councils in their existing plans.
- Another member asked if the Council might meet in other parts of the region. Steve noted this was possible.
- A member asked if the resource assessments might be expanded to include a groundwater quality resource assessment. Jennifer Welte responded that there are constraints on data availability, and Steve Simpson noted that there is some information that has been provided to Council members in the past through USGS. Steve also noted that other Councils have identified this as an information need. A member noted that overall groundwater quality is very good in our area, but we need additional data.

Another member offered that we need data from the multiple aquifers that underly the Council area.

- It was noted in discussion that the Councils can make recommendations for more data to support planning.
- It was noted that the Council was fully appointed this year but does have one vacancy now. It was also noted that the Council can make recommendations for appointments to the Council. Richard asked that if anyone on the Council has recommendations to share them with him.
- A Council member noted that water quality addresses more than assimilative capacity, and Steve agreed, noting the importance of factors such as fecal coliform and TMDLs.
- A Council member noted he was looking forward to learning more about agricultural water use since he is more familiar with municipal water resource management.
- A Council member said that the Albany wastewater treatment plant has had some problems but that the work of the Council and others in the region have helped to see that problem addressed in a new permit. He said the region will see better water quality, especially during rain events, as a result.
- A Council member commented on the dominance of agricultural water use in this region.
- A Council member asked that the GAEPD Director attend a Council meeting from time to time.

LUNCH BREAK

Chairman's Report

The Chairman welcomed the new members and acknowledged the commitment and contribution of all members to the work of the Council. He reported on two letters of support he provided for grant proposals:

- Georgia Tech proposal to provide energy and water efficiency consulting to wastewater treatment plants in GA and in this region
- Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center proposal to convert agricultural withdrawals from surface waters in the Lower Flint region to deeper aquifer groundwater withdrawals

Chairman Royal said that it would be helpful to convene a Plan Review Committee to help with the plan review and revision process over the next year. He asked members willing to serve on the committee to let him know.

Report on Stripling Irrigation Research Park Seed Grant Project

Calvin Perry gave an update on the Stripling Irrigation Research Park's seed grant project on innovative irrigation scheduling tools in the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee and Upper Flint Regions. The project ran in 2019 and 2020. They worked with county extension agents in nine counties to help growers test using soil moisture sensors and irrigation apps to better schedule cotton irrigation. The project will soon issue a final report sharing findings. The report will be sent to the Council. Calvin also announced that the 4H2O Camp program in Southwest Georgia was recently recognized as a Water Hero in the Clean 13 Report that the Georgia Water Coalition issues each year.

Briefing: What are FACETS and GA-FIT?

Kristin Rowles and Mark Masters gave quick updates on these projects that currently involve several Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Council members.

FACETS: Floridan Aquifer Collaborative Engagement for Sustainability -- FACETS brings together scientists and stakeholders to develop new knowledge needed to explore tradeoffs and synergies between the regional agricultural economy and environmental quality and understand changes needed to achieve agricultural water security and environmental protection. At its core is a Participatory Modeling Process that engages stakeholders with researchers to develop and interpret models of the Floridan Aquifer together.

GA-FIT: Georgia Flow Incentive Trust – This is a new project led by a partnership of the Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center with the Nature Conservancy. This project will test innovative approaches in water management and identify new paths forward to water security for agriculture and natural systems in Southwest Georgia. It will provide field-tested data on producer preferences with respect to irrigation suspension via an auction format to inform policy. Several Council members are involved in the GA-FIT Advisory Board.

A Council member asked about the likelihood of more than seed funding for a program like GA-FIT. Mark noted some funding source options that might sustain such a program and noted that it is difficult to answer that question now before the ideas are field tested in the next few years.

Report on Thomasville Stormwater Planning Seed Grant Project

Steve Simpson gave a brief update on this seed grant project, which is currently being implemented by the City of Thomasville to address stormwater management in the city. The project recently hosted a stormwater workshop, which Chairman Royal addressed, and the project has also initiated public education efforts. The project is underway, and the project leader

will make a presentation to the Council about it in more detail at a future meeting. In response to a question, Steve clarified that the stormwater action plan being developed by Thomasville is a first step toward improved stormwater management implementation in the city. Steve suggested that members begin thinking about possible seed grant ideas for the next funding cycle, expected in fall 2022.

EPD Report: Planning Schedule and Resource Assessments

Jennifer Welte (GAEPD) explained to the Council the role of GAEPD in regional water planning, which includes administration of the process and development of technical materials that support planning. GAEPD monitors the process to ensure that inter-Council coordination is addressed as needed. The GAEPD Director approves the regional water plans, and the plans are consulted in permitting decisions. Jennifer reviewed the recent and upcoming activities in the regional water plan review and revision process. Jennifer provided an overview of the forecasting and resource assessments that support regional water planning.

Discussion summary:

- In response to a Council member's question, Jennifer explained that the water quality assessment will be shifting from fecal coliform to other pathogen indicators (e.g., E. coli) that are better metrics for human health concerns. This shift aligns with a proposed change currently in development in the state water quality standards. Jennifer and Steve explained that with these changes, there will be changes to existing fecal coliform TMDLs. In response to a follow-up question, Jennifer clarified that no tightening is expected in permit limits with the shift from fecal coliform to E. coli.
- In response to a question, Jennifer said that surface water and groundwater interaction in this region are considered in the resource assessments. She noted that detail on the linkages will be provided in future Council meetings.
- In response to a question, Jennifer clarified that all seed grant applicants compete for the same pool of funds.
- A member asked for additional clarification on the grid spacing of the updated groundwater model. Jennifer noted that the grid spacing is much smaller than previous models such that it is more reflective of localized pumping. GA EPD uses these models in some permit evaluations.

Water and Wastewater Forecasts Overview

Steve Simpson provided an overview of the water and wastewater forecasts for the region. (See slides.) Steve said that there will soon be a web-based dashboard available with the regional water planning forecast information.

Discussion summary:

- It was clarified that the municipal water and wastewater forecasts are based on 2019 Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) population projections.
- A member noted that the state has made great advancements in knowledge of agricultural water use through data collection and metering and asked if similar advancements had been made in municipal and industrial use. Steve said he thinks we are getting better and better information, but there is still some uncertainty on the long-term forecasts.

Agricultural Water Demand Forecasts

Mark Masters presented the updated agricultural water demand forecasts. He noted that the forecasts are closely related to the irrigated acreage. Maps of irrigated acreage were updated by GWPPC in 2020. Mark explained that the agricultural forecasts depend also on crop projections (through 2060) and crop water needs (wet, normal, dry years). He explained how we are also making expanded use of meter data in making the estimates of water use and crop needs.

Discussion summary:

- In response to a question, Mark said that the irrigated acreage database has been adjusted for 6,000 irrigated acres converted to solar in SWGA in the last several years. In response to another question, he noted that the permit for water withdrawal for those acres is tied to that land and would either become inactive or revoked in the case of such a conversion.
- A Council member asked if the forecasts consider new crops in the region (e.g., vegetables, sunflowers). Mark noted that they are being considered.
- A Council member asked about the source of future growth in agricultural water demand. Mark responded that currently there are limits of the moratorium on surface water and Upper Floridan aquifer groundwater, so at this time, it would likely be from deeper aquifers in this region.
- A Council member asked how the forecasts project acreage changes. Mark responded that the agricultural economist on the team looks at price as an indicator to project acreage. The Council member said that over the past 40 years, his farm's productivity has increased but water use has not. Other factors have supported productivity. He asked if production is a good indicator of future water use. Mark acknowledged that we are continuously improving our ability to get "more crop per drop" and described the challenges of projecting future production and water use.
- A Council member noted that solar farm conversion might have adverse impacts for the regional agricultural economy. Mark referred to the FACETS modeling as addressing economic impacts of such land use changes in the region.

- A Council member commented that a 25% increase in use over 40 years does not seem unrealistic.

Vision and Goals Discussion

Steve Simpson and Corinne Valentine led a Council discussion to review the Council's vision and goals. The Council reviewed the statements. Members had the following comments:

- A Council member said that the vision statement is all-inclusive and suggested keeping it as-is.
- Another Council member suggested that the vision statement should emphasize "now and in the future."
- A member commented on the efforts of Golden Triangle Resource Conservation and Development Council to improve clean water access and install septic systems for many limited resource families in Southwest Georgia.
- A member suggested modifying the vision statement to say: "*continue* to manage."
- A member said he likes the vision statement, but he might support some consideration of changing the word sustainability because non-Council members might not understand the intent of this term here.
- A Council member suggested that the current statements address current and future conditions as written.

Murray Campbell made a motion to reaffirm the Council's existing Vision and Goals. David Dixon seconded the motion. The motion was adopted by consensus.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Next Steps

Chairman Royal solicited volunteers to serve on the plan review subcommittee and also asked for suggestions that may be passed to the Speaker to replace Mr. Champion's position on the Council. The planning support team will be in communication about the next meeting date and location soon.

Adjournment

Council Chairman Royal thanked members for attending and the meeting was adjourned.

Council Members Attending November 5, 2021 Meeting

Richard Royal (Chair)

John Heath

Chris Addleton

Connie Hobbs

Steve Bailey

Mike Newberry

Murray Campbell

Calvin Perry

Marc Demott

Jay Smith

Fred Dent

Steve Sykes

David Dixon

Cory Thomas

Vince Falcione

Other Attendees

Mark Masters (GWPPC)

Corinne Valentine (B&V)

Jennifer Welte (GAEPD)

Jake Dean (B&V)

Bert Early (GA Forestry Commission)

Steve Golladay (Jones Center)*

Steve Simpson (B&V)

Kristin Rowles (GWPPC)*

**By videoconference*