



Meeting Summary

Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water Council Meeting

Columbus Water Works Service Center – Columbus, GA

November 10, 2021

Welcome & Introductions

Middle Chattahoochee Chair Steve Davis started the meeting by welcoming the Council. Mark Masters (GWPPC) reviewed the agenda and introduced the Council support team. Next, the members interviewed each other and then introduced each other to the group.

Chairman's Report

The Chairman 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 Georgia and in this region.
- Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center proposal to convert agricultural withdrawals from surface waters in the Lower Flint region to deep groundwater withdrawals.

Water and Wastewater Forecasts Overview

Steve Simpson and Jake Dean (Black & Veatch) provided an overview of the updated water and wastewater forecasts for the region. See slides; note that slides for all presentations in this meeting are posted on the Council website. Steve said that there will soon be a web-based dashboard available with the regional water planning forecast information.

Discussion summary:

- In response to a question, Steve Simpson clarified that the water demand forecasts do not reflect “net” demand (net of wastewater returns). He said that the wastewater forecasts are also available, but not included in these slides.
- A Council member noted that the municipal water demand forecasts are based on the population forecasts and expressed concern that the population forecasts are too low in

this region. Other members noted concerns about the population forecasts and about the industrial forecasts. A member expressed concern that industrial forecasts are not increasing but that industry is being attracted to the region. Council members would like to see these concerns reflected in the report on the forecasts. They suggested that the overall credibility of the plan could suffer without some additional explanation. Steve Simpson noted that the Council can adjust its planning to consider such concerns about underestimates.

- An observer indicated that several industries (e.g., paper plant on this side of river and industrial and energy demands on the Alabama side of the river) appear not to be included in the forecasts. Christine Voudy said that the resource assessments will account for Alabama water use in the basin.
- Steve Simpson said that the industrial forecasts is generally flat because many of the industries did not provide estimates of future water use. The input received from the industrial stakeholder group was that future demands were anticipated to be offset by increased water efficiency.
- In response to a Council member's question, Steve Simpson noted that the comments of the Council members would be considered in the forecast report and by the Council in its review and revision of the plan.
- Council members suggested their revised plan note data gaps and needs related to the forecasts.
- A Council member asked what was driving the agricultural use forecast increases. Steve Simpson said that Mark Masters would cover that in a few minutes.
- The dashboard for the forecasts will be available on the GA Water Planning Website. It was clarified that it will be forecasts only, not current actual use, but the forecasts are based on current use.
- A Council member asked about the reliability of the forecasts. Steve Simpson noted the forecasts are based on the best available information at this time. Updates are made every five years. He said that the short-term forecasts have more certainty than long-term forecasts.
- In response to a question, Steve Simpson commented that forecasts used in master planning by utilities are different from the regional forecasts in their purposes. Master planning will have factors of safety in their projections.
- A Council member commented that he would like to look at demand forecasts in drought years, particularly for surface water users. Steve Simpson noted that the resource assessments will provide an opportunity to look at such conditions.

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 reviewed the forecasts. (See slides).

Discussion summary:

- In response to a question, Mark explained that the 75th percentile for the agricultural forecasts reflects water use for dry climate conditions. The percentiles are based on actual use in the past several years. At the 75th percentile for use, only 25% of years would have higher use. The 75th percentile generally reflects use in a dry year and supports conservation planning for future water use.
- A Council member asked what the reason is for choosing the 75th percentile for the forecast presentation. Mark said that it generally reflects conservatism in terms in agricultural water use. It supports the Council to consider potential agricultural water demands in dry years, when demands are higher, without planning to the most extreme conditions. Jennifer Welte (GAEPD) noted that the 75th percentile use is what is incorporated into the future conditions analysis in the surface water and groundwater availability resource assessments.
- An observer asked why the agricultural forecasts are increasing when it does not seem that acreage is increasing much. Mark responded that an important factor in the increase was the removal of the assumption used in prior forecasts that acreage irrigated from surface water uses approximately 70% of what the same acreage irrigated from a groundwater source would use. This assumption was consistent with work completed by UGA in 2004 which showed that, in general, surface water users did not always have adequate water supply to irrigate the recommended amount for crop production. As part of this current round of planning, a review of data collected over ten years through the Agricultural Metering Program showed that application rates on surface and ground water sources are generally consistent. Removing the “70% assumption” from the surface water estimates therefore results in a higher water use estimate even though the number of surface water acres has remained flat and even declined since 2010. Mark also noted that the decline in surface water acres seen in the Middle Chattahoochee Council Region along with its neighbors in the Flint reinforce the effect of aligning of surface and groundwater application rates. Specifically, much of the “marginal” acreage irrigated by surface water (acreage that did not have an adequate source to supply crop water demand) has either been converted to groundwater or taken out of irrigated

production. Finally, Mark also reminded the Council that forecast crop prices, and the expected impact those prices have on irrigated acreage, is another important factor in the forecasts of agricultural water demand into the future.

- A Council member asked whether there were potential policy or technology changes that might change these forecasts significantly. Mark responded that this was very possible. He noted that over 6,000 acres in the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee region have shifted to solar farms. This change occurred since the last update. He said that water efficiency can be expected to continue to improve. He said that the forecasts are based on current conditions and factors, but those conditions and factors will change over time and that needs to be considered in interpreting the forecasts.

GAEPD Report: Planning Schedule and Resource Assessments

Christine Voudy (GAEPD) thanked the Council members for their commitment and contributions to regional water planning. She 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. Christine reviewed the recent and upcoming activities in the regional water plan review and revision process. All regional water plans are projected to go to public notice by September 30, 2022, and the regional water plans and Metro Water District plan are projected to be updated by December 2022. With four quarterly meetings in 2022, the Council will work toward approving a draft plan for public review by its third meeting next year. Christine provided an overview of the forecasting and resource assessments that support regional water planning. (See slides.)

Discussion summary:

- Following a question from a member, Christine provided additional detail on the BEAM model that will be used to complete the surface water availability resource assessment. She said that it is being developed by Hazen and Sawyer, and it will be presented to the Council at an upcoming meeting.
- In response to a question, Christine said that the sustainable yield in the groundwater resource assessment considers the impacts of use over time relative to recharge. It is set in terms of millions of gallons per day of withdrawal, and it is assumed that level of use is applied year-round in the modeling to determine sustainable yield. This approach supports conservative planning.
- Christine clarified that, in the groundwater resource assessment, agricultural demands are treated as transient and other wells are assumed as year-round demands.
- In response to a question, Christine said that the water quality assessment will look at several parameters. She will check whether it will address bacteria.

- In response to a question, Christine said that the condition of the aquifers varies by aquifer. The Clayton Aquifer assessment indicates a decline that has not stabilized. The other aquifers in the region are generally in better condition.

LUNCH BREAK

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. (See slides.)

Summary of discussion:

- A Council member talked about the value of presenting information on the Council's work to his county commission. Steve noted that other Council members are encouraged to arrange for such presentations as well. The planning support team can assist with these presentations.
- A Council member asked what groundwater aquifer was located in the Muscogee/Chattahoochee County area. Christine Voudy responded that the Floridan, Claiborne, Clayton, and Cretaceous Aquifers are available in that area.
- In response to a question, Steve said that GAEPD directs funding to the forecasting, resource assessments, and Council support.
- In response to a question, Steve explained that the Metro Water District plan is developed a bit differently from the regional water plans, but that the schedule for updates is the same.
- In response to a question, Steve said that GAEPD looks to address any Council coordination issues as the plans are developed and approved.
- A Council member asked whether the role of the Council includes advocacy for regional water resources. He suggested that advocacy might be strategically important for the Council to make its plan more effective. Steve noted that the Council is responsible for its plan. Another Council member said that it's not a primary responsibility but acknowledged that advocacy could be quite important. The Council Chair noted that the Council has submitted letters that advocate for the Council's positions (as reflected in its plan) in the past (e.g., Coweta County proposed change to Metro Water District Plan). The Council seeks to provide constructive input and to act as advocates for the regional water plan.
- A Council member commented on the importance of recreation in the region's waters, and suggested it be included in the plan. In response to a question about how this can be incorporated into the plan, Steve said it could be incorporated into the vision and goals,

and Kristin noted it could also be considered in the surface water availability resource assessment.

- A Council member commented that the inclusion of Tallapoosa Basin counties was puzzling given the different water resources. It was noted that the region is varied and based on county lines. A Council member said that those counties are more similar to other counties in this region than to those to the north of them.
- A Council member commented that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Water Control Manual for the Chattahoochee has been updated since the last planning cycle, and the update might lead to some revisions to the Council's plan.

Vision and Goals Discussion

Corinne Valentine (Black & Veatch) led a Council discussion to review the Council's vision and goals. The Council reviewed the statements.

In response to a question, Christine commented on how GAEPD considers the regional water plans in the permitting process; this process is focused more on the management practices than on the vision and goals. In response to a question, Steve explained that the management practices do not align on a one-to-one basis with the goals; each may align with multiple goals.

Members had the following comments:

Vision Statement

- Modify to read "we and" our descendants.
- Consider adding the word "sustainable." Possibly as: "safe, clean, abundant, and sustainable supply of water to meet their needs."
- Is the word "needs" too narrow? I think we should consider more than needs. Maybe it should be "needs and priorities."
- Is it inclusive enough? I think so because it includes descendants.
- What are "reasonable efforts?" Maybe say "seeking to accomplish that through cooperation..." (drop "reasonable efforts").
- A good deal of the basin is economically depressed. Does economic development or equity have a role here?
- I would like to see the other Councils' vision statements.
- What does "preservation" mean here? It reminds me of maintaining historic buildings. Consider using "stewardship" instead.

Goals

- We might want to consider how well our goals address both rural and urban areas of the region.

- I would like to see recreation in this plan.
- Recreation is in Goal 3, and it's always been an important part of the discussion. Maybe we need to bring it more to the forefront.
- Fairness of opportunity for the smaller parts of the county should be considered in the goals and in the management practices.
- What if a major industry wanted to come to Stewart County but needed a lot of water? Stewart is one of the poorest counties in the U.S.
- Perhaps a goal should be to "enhance prosperity for all" or to "promote the general welfare."
- It might be good to re-do the goals. Maybe go to fewer/streamlined goals that we can focus on.

Chairman Davis asked for volunteers for a committee to work on review and revision of the vision and goals and bring back recommendations to the Council. The following members volunteered: Kenneth Van Horn, John Asbell, Dan Gilbert, Victoria Barnett, and Mac Moya.

Public Comment

Billy Turner (Tri-Rivers Waterway Development Association) commented that navigation is included in the Council's goals, but that commercial navigation is no longer active on the river. The channel and locks and dams have not been maintained for commercial navigation. He reported that there is an effort being led by Rep. Sanford Bishop in Congress to re-establish navigation in the ACF. He commented on some potential navigation opportunities that would be economically beneficial to the region. He suggested that the Council consider making commercial navigation a more specific objective in the regional water plan. In response to a question, he said that they were looking at making the channel navigable up to Columbus.

Next Steps

Steve Simpson reviewed some next steps including a meeting summary and Council member review of the 2017 regional water plan, forecasts, and other materials. Chairman Davis asked that materials for Council members to review be distributed by email. The planning support team will be in communication with Council members about the next meeting date and location soon. The Plan Review Committee formed at today's meeting will be convened to address the vision and goals as discussed in this meeting.

Adjournment

Chairman Davis thanked members for attending, and the meeting was adjourned.

Council Members Attending November 10, 2021 Meeting

Steve Davis (Chair)	Jim Hayes
Hannah Anderson*	Bill Heath*
John Asbell	Harry Lange
Victoria Barrett	Ed Moon
Patrick Bowie	Mac Moye
James Emery	Kenneth Van Horn
Gardiner Garrard	Matt Windom
Dan Gilbert	

Other Attendees

Jake Dean (B&V)	Kristin Rowles (GWPPC)*
Bert Early (GA Forestry Commission)	Laura Schneider (River Valley Regional Commission)*
Damian Hake (Ft. Benning)	Steve Simpson (B&V)
Mark Masters (GWPPC)	Kirk Ticknor (Ft. Benning)
Billy Turner (Tri-Rivers Waterway Development Association)	Corinne Valentine (B&V)
Chris Manganiello (Chattahoochee Riverkeeper)	Christine Voudy (GAEPD)
	Jennifer Welte (GAEPD)*

**By videoconference*