



## **Meeting Summary**

**Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water Council**

**Meeting Columbus Water Works Service Center**

**Columbus, GA March 15, 2022**

### **Welcome & Introductions**

Middle Chattahoochee Chair Steve Davis started the meeting by welcoming the Council. Kristin Rowles (GWPPC) reviewed the agenda and introduced the Council support team. Meeting materials are posted on the Council website.

### **Chairman's Report**

Chairman Davis thanked the vision and goals committee for their work on updating the council's vision and goals and encouraged council members to join a committee.

### **American Rescue Plan Act: Water & Infrastructure Awards**

Kristin Rowles (GWPPC) presented the preliminary awards for Water and Infrastructure grants under the American Rescue Plan Act in the Middle Chattahoochee Region. A map with the awards was distributed to the Council. Next, she described one of the awards focused on agricultural source water conversion that will be implemented, in part, in this region. This \$49.8 million project will be implemented by the Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center at Albany State University in partnership with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The primary focus of the project will be the conversion of existing agricultural surface water withdrawals in the Lower Flint River Basin to deep aquifer sources (Claiborne, Cretaceous). The project aims to install 242 deep groundwater wells over a 5-year period. The project will also conduct conservation planning at each site, collect monitoring data on aquifer conditions and aquatic ecosystems, improve and expand flow augmentation systems, and engage stakeholders in the region in water resources and endangered species management planning. The project implements recommendations in the Middle Chattahoochee, Lower Flint-Ochlockonee, and Upper Flint Regional Water Plans and builds on a regional water plan

implementation seed grant focused on source water conversion in the Ichawaynochaway Creek Basin.

Discussion summary:

- A Council member asked if there are any ripple effects expected from the source water conversion project. Kristin described the potential benefits to drought management and endangered species protections here and elsewhere. She also noted that the project will improve our understanding of aquifer conditions and the status of freshwater mussel populations in the region. Christine Voudy (GAEPD) added that GAEPD will gain a better understanding of the deep aquifers from this project, and this information will support permitting and planning.
- A Council member asked if municipal withdrawals would be included or affected. Kristin said that the project is targeting only agricultural withdrawals. Steve Simpson (Black & Veatch) said that most municipal withdrawals in the project area come from groundwater. Christine Voudy noted that most of the project area's water use is for agriculture. Through the permitting process, the new groundwater withdrawals will be evaluated to prevent adverse impacts to existing withdrawals.
- A Council member asked how the different aquifers are interconnected. Christine Voudy said that aquifers are interconnected and described ongoing aquifer monitoring that seeks to better estimate interconnections. Gathering additional data through this project will also support improved modeling in the future.

### **Vision & Goals – Committee Report**

Council Member Ken Van Horn presented the Vision and Goals recommendations of the Plan Review Committee (PRC). The committee recommended some additions to the vision statement, as follows:

*Our vision is that our descendants have safe, clean, abundant, and sustainable water in the Middle Chattahoochee Region through cooperation, education, scientific research, best available data, conservation, and stewardship.*

For the Goals, the committee recommended replacing the existing goals statements with a simpler and shorter list of goals. The PRC recommended the following as the new goals statements:

1. Maintain collaboration that acknowledges the significant differences of geography, population, economic conditions, and biodiversity in the region to build consensus around how to provide for the needs of this region sustainably and for the foreseeable future.

2. Plan to protect the quality of the water in the rivers, streams, and reservoirs in our region for the purposes of enhancing the quality of life for the people in our region, conserving fish and wildlife, promoting recreation, supporting our economy, and protecting public health, with due consideration of environmental and economic sustainability.
3. Plan the use of water in the rivers, streams, and reservoirs within our region to provide sufficient flow and lake levels for public and private uses, including transportation, commerce, energy production, agriculture, public water supply, flood control, recreation, industry, and economic development, with due consideration of environmental and economic sustainability.

*Patrick Bowie made a motion with a second by Jimmie Hayes to approve the Vision as recommended by the Committee. The Council approved the recommendation by consensus.*

*Patrick Bowie made a motion with a second by John Asbell to approve the Goals as recommended by the Committee. The Council discussed amending the goals to specifically address groundwater in Goals 2 and 3. The goals were revised as follows:*

2. Plan to protect the quality of the water in the rivers, streams, reservoirs, and aquifers in our region for the purposes of enhancing the quality of life for the people in our region, conserving fish and wildlife, promoting recreation, supporting our economy, and protecting public health, with due consideration of environmental and economic sustainability.
3. Plan the use of water in the rivers, streams, reservoirs, and aquifers within our region to provide sufficient flow and lake levels for public and private uses, including transportation, commerce, energy production, agriculture, public water supply, flood control, recreation, industry, and economic development, with due consideration of environmental and economic sustainability.

*The Council approved the recommended goals, as revised by the Council today, by consensus.*

Ken Van Horn concluded his report by referring the group to several specific concerns and issues that were included in the “parking lot” for the Council to consider in the plan update as part of management practices and recommendations.

### **Next Steps in Plan Development**

Corinne Valentine (Black & Veatch) presented the next steps in plan development. She noted that the plan was last updated in 2017. She stated that the next plan draft should be presented in August to allow time for GAEPD review, public notification and comment, and finalization by the

end of 2022. She mentioned the current focus for plan updates includes:

- Section 1: Introduction
- Section 2: Planning region information
- Section 4: Water and Wastewater Forecasts

Other sections will be updated as resource assessments are finalized and based on the Council's discussion of the Management Practices and Recommendation to the State, and other edits as needed based on Council discussions. Council members were invited to join the Plan Review Committee to assist in reviewing revised plan documents and making recommendations to the Council on edits.

Next, Kristin asked Council Members to consider joining an Inter-Council Coordination Committee that will address planning across regions. In this case, the group will consider the Metro Water District plan, as well as the plans of the Upper Flint and Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Councils. The Council currently has a set of joint recommendations with those two Councils that will need to be considered for updates. *Council members Ken Van Horn and Patrick Bowie stated their interest in the Inter-Council Coordination Committee.*

### **Overview of Resource Assessments**

Kristin Rowles (GWPPC) provided an overview of the resource assessments and a short discussion of why and how the planning process uses models. She also reviewed the schedule for the presentation of resource assessment model results, with some at this Council meeting and some at the next meeting. She encouraged the Council members to consider whether the resource assessments point to areas they would like to discuss as a Council and consider how particular concerns are addressed in the regional water plan. She also asked them to think about the metrics that we use to evaluate resource conditions. She encouraged the Council members to ask questions throughout the discussion of the resource assessment models.

### **Surface Water Availability Assessment**

Kristin introduced the Basin Environmental Assessment Model (BEAM), which is being developed to evaluate surface water availability in the region. She described how BEAM will enhance the Council's ability to consider surface water availability at a much higher level of detail. She presented the schematic for BEAM for the ACF Basin and discussed the types of nodes at which results can be evaluated. She explained the water use and permit conditions that will be evaluated in the baseline model run. Her slides are available in the meeting materials.

Council discussion of BEAM addressed the following:

- It was clarified that BEAM uses USGS gage data.
- A Council member asked how sensitive BEAM is to evaluating flows for recreation. It was

noted that for whitewater course conditions, hourly changes are important. It was noted that the model can be used to evaluate flows relative to recreational metrics, but that the model timestep is daily and will not provide information on changes at the hourly level. In response to further discussion, Wei Zeng (GAEPD) said that it might be technically possible for an open channel hydraulics model to more closely evaluate flows at the Columbus whitewater course. The development of that type of model is outside the scope of BEAM development and outside the scope of surface water resource assessment.

- A Council member asked if we could use BEAM to evaluate the impact of removing GA Power dams on recreational flows. Wei Zeng (GAEPD) answered yes, if additional data is gathered for a more detailed local analysis. John Asbell said that he would also follow-up with the Council with information from GA Power's evaluation of these impacts.

Next, a video presentation by Dr. Wei Zeng (GAEPD) provided four examples of performance metrics that could be evaluated using BEAM: water supply, wastewater assimilation, recreation, and fish habitat. Dr. Zeng's slides are available in the meeting materials. Wei asked the council for feedback on the metrics.

Members had the following comments:

- A council member asked what the ft<sup>3</sup>/ft unit of measure was. It was answered that it is the measure of habitat available per linear unit of a stream.
- A council member asked about the instream flow protection thresholds that are included in permits (and addressed in BEAM). Wei Zeng (GAEPD) explained that that instream flow protection thresholds are usually a special condition of a permit. In the permit, it will say, at a location along a river a certain cfs is to be maintained in the stream, and withdrawals should not decrease stream flow below that level.
- A council member noted that it would be interesting to look at the downstream effects of hydropower generation.
- Council members noted that power generation from West Point and Walter F. George reservoirs, and lake levels in USACE reservoirs are of interest to them.
- In response to a question, it was clarified that 7Q10 is the lowest 7-day average flow that occurs on average once every 10 years. It is a metric used in wastewater permitting to address the adequacy of flows for wastewater assimilation. It is also a metric that has been used in regional water planning as an indicator of low flows.

### **Groundwater Availability Assessment**

Christine Voudy (GAEPD) provided an overview on the groundwater availability assessment and covered five metrics for sustainable yield. She reviewed the results for several aquifers in the

region. Her slides are available in the meeting materials. The results generally compare groundwater withdrawals to sustainable yield estimates.

Members had the following comments:

- A Council member commented that the metric for 40% reduction in baseflow seems high. Christine said this 40% is their target to avoid adverse changes to aquifer properties while still enabling water use.
- A council member asked about the productivity of the crystalline rock aquifer. Christine answered that it depends on the fractures. At greater depths, pressure results in less productivity because fractures close up.
- A Council member asked if we can artificially recharge the aquifer. Christine noted that in the State of Georgia, we do not allow non-natural aquifer recharge because it can potentially change the quality of the aquifer.
- A council member asked if data is collected from well drillers. Christine said that we get well logs and verify the information with USGS.
- A council member asked if we know the location and aquifers for agricultural wells. Christine answered yes, and we get that information for permitted wells.
- A council member asked if it is first-come-first-served with withdrawal permits for groundwater. Christine noted that if it is a large withdrawal, EPD will model it before issuing permits to confirm the additional withdrawals do not impact surrounding wells or damage the aquifer.
- A council member asked how often groundwater withdrawal permits are denied. Christine said that it depends on aquifer and location.
- A council member asked why there are negative numbers in the contours on the aquifer diagrams. Christine answered that the negative contours are below sea level.

### **Surface Water Quality Assessment**

Steve Simpson (B&V) provided an introduction to the surface water quality assessment material from Dr. Liz Booth (GAEPD). A video presentation from Dr. Booth described the changes in water quality standards from the Triennial Review process, the assessment of impaired waters, and the water quality resource assessment including modeling approaches and types of results. Her slides are available in the meeting materials.

Members had the following comments:

- In response to a question, Steve Simpson explained that PFAS are a family of chemical compounds that do not break down well in the environment.

- A council member asked whether lake chlorophyll a levels and fishing conditions are related. Dr. Booth answered that GAEPD develops site specific lake standards. Generally, North Georgia has higher limits and sometimes criteria for lakes need to be adjusted.
- A council member asked how bacterial impairments can be addressed. Steve Simpson said that limits are set to reduce bacteria from point source discharges, fences along streams can be used to prevent livestock waste from entering stream, and sewer mains near streams should be maintained to not allow water to come out of sewers during flooding. It was also mentioned that bacteria samples tend to spike when a rainfall occurs.

### **Resource Assessment Wrap-Up/Next Steps**

Kristin Rowles (GWPPC) asked the Council, based on today's presentations, if there were specific topics they would like to discuss at the next meeting to consider in revisions for the regional water plan.

Members had the following comments:

- A council member asked if the Council could review its recommendations from the past and consider how to evaluate progress. Kristin said that this was a good idea for the next meeting.
- A Council member commented that stakeholder input should be considered when looking at our plan and asked that we try to solicit input from key stakeholders.

Kristin said that it might be a good idea to reconvene the Council's committees on Water Quality and Water Quantity to discuss plan revisions. She said that she would be in touch with members in follow-up to this meeting to solicit members for various committees. She said that at the next meeting, we will focus on additional resource assessment results and reviewing management practices and recommendations in the plan.

### **Public Comment**

Jim Griffith asked for attention to be brought to constructing a 190-acre reservoir in Haralson County for surface water supply.

### **Adjournment**

Kristin noted that a summary of the meeting would be developed and the summary, presentations, and links to the video presentations would be posted on the Council website. Chairman Davis thanked members for attending, and the meeting was adjourned.

*Note: A report from GAEPD was not included during the meeting, as planned, due to time constraints. A summary of points that would have been addressed in the report by the EPD Council Liaison Christine Voudy is attached to this summary.*

**Council Members Attending March 15, 2022 Meeting**

John Asbell	Jimmy Hayes
Victoria Barrett	Harry Lange
Laura Lee Bernstein	Ed Moon
Patrick Bowie	Mac Moye
Steven Davis	Kenneth Van Horn
James Emery	Matt Windom*
Dan Gilbert	Hannah Anderson*
Joseph Griffith	Bill Heath*

**Other Attendees**

Kristin Rowles (GWPPC)	Laura Schneider (River Valley Regional Commission)*
Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC)	Chris Mangianello (Chattahoochee River Keeper)*
Steve Simpson (B&V)	Paul McDaniel (GA. Forestry Commission)*
Corinne Valentine (B&V)	Gerard Gonthier*
Jake Dean (B&V)	Courtney Cooper*
Elizabeth Booth (GAEPD)*	Daniel Calhoun*
Wei Zeng (GAEPD)*	John Joiner*
Christine Voudy (GAEPD)	
Jennifer Welte (GAEPD)	

*\*By videoconference*



Report from Christine Voudy, GAEPD

EPD updates:

1. The Metro Water District currently has their draft Plan updates out to stakeholders within their District, and they will plan to release a draft for the Regional Water Planning Councils to review next month. Danny Johnson will be coordinating a virtual meeting to go over highlights of their Plan updates with all interested Council members sometime during mid- to late April. As soon as we have that date, we'll get that information out to you. They will be asking for a 30-day comment period, so that they can receive early input from the Councils before they take their draft Plan updates to their Governing Board in June. Looking further out, there will be a public comment period for the draft Metro District Plan in the August timeframe.
2. The Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) has conducted 2 studies that may be of interest to the Council, and we anticipate updates on these studies for you at your next meeting.
  - a. The first study was a statewide Biosolids Assessment. The study developed biosolid production estimates for each planning region in the state, analyzed various elements that impact biosolids management (including regulatory, technology and cost considerations), summarized the opportunities and challenges of regional biosolids management, and documented gaps between current practices and future needs for biosolids management.
  - b. The second study is a water supply redundancy study that has been conducted for each planning region. The study identifies opportunities for water supply redundancy for public water systems by identifying and prioritizing potential interconnection and redundancy projects that would be capable of providing backup water supply to public water systems. The study analyzes and ranks potential projects based on emergency planning benchmarks and risk evaluations.