



## **Meeting Summary**

### **Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water Council**

**Columbus Water Works Service Center, Columbus, GA**

**March 16, 2023**

### **Welcome & Introductions**

Steve Simpson (B&V) welcomed the Middle Chattahoochee (MC) Council members and members and attendees introduced themselves. Steve began the meeting by reviewing the agenda. Meeting materials are posted on the Council's website.

### **Chair's Report**

Chairman Davis welcomed the Council members, particularly those involved in the Committees. He thanked those members that have been around since the Council's foundation and the newer members present.

### **Planning Timeline**

Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC) covered a summary from the last Council meeting. She recapped how the Council discussed the Water Quality Assessment results. The Council also reviewed and discussed committee reports from Water Quality and Quantity in the previous meeting. Lastly, they considered recommendations from the Inter-Council Coordination Committee. Since the last meeting in December 2022, the Water Quantity and Quality Committees have met once and have reports to discuss today. She also mentioned that today is our last meeting before the submittal of the Draft Plan and we will have a final meeting in June.

### **Chattahoochee River Act**

Chris Manganiello (Chattahoochee Riverkeeper) introduced the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper program which was established in 1994 and they currently have approximately 10,000 members with offices in Gainesville, Atlanta, and LaGrange. They focus on advocacy, research communications, cooperation, monitoring, and legal action surround water resources. They have an upcoming event for Sweep the Hooch on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The Chattahoochee River Program, Sec. 8144 is included in the Water Resources Development Act, where the Army

Corps of Engineers (Corps) plans to develop a two-year Comprehensive Plan to encourage projects to improve water quality in the Chattahoochee River Basin. Eligible projects include sediment and erosion control, ecosystem restoration, protection of essential public works, wastewater treatment plants and related facilities, beneficial uses of dredged materials, and other related projects.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked if this project is managed by the Mobile District Office and if they are open for people contacting them about potential projects?

- Chris answered yes, but the project hasn't been officially established just yet, so they are in the works of having a point person for contact.

A Council member asked if a conservation project focused on dirt roads would be possible? He mentioned that In Stewart County there are extensive dirt roads that need assistance.

- Chris answered that once the 2-year conservation project has opened up, presenting and pitching the project for sediment and erosion control will be possible.

A Council member asked how full the queue is already for projects and are if there are any caps on project funding?

- Chris answered that there is no project list yet since the Corps have not started the 2-year plan process yet, and no one project can be more than \$15 million.

### **EPD Updates**

Kelli-Ann Schrage (GAEPD) presented information on the submittal of the Regional Water Plan draft and adoption process by the EPD Director. The Council is to submit the Draft Updated Plan to GAEPD by March 29<sup>th</sup> and GAEPD will advertise a Public Notice on March 31<sup>st</sup>. This will begin a 45-day public comment period on the draft plan that will end on May 15<sup>th</sup>. The Council will incorporate any changes it believes are needed based on comments received during their next meeting in June. After the last meeting in June, the Final Updated Plan should be submitted by June 23<sup>rd</sup>. The final step in the process is for the EPD Director to adopt the plan by June 30, 2023.

Kelli-Ann advised that GAEPD is currently accepting applications for Section 319(h) Grant Funding. This funding is for projects that implement watershed management plans, address impaired waters and non-point source pollution, install Best Management Practices, engage in partnerships, collect water quality data, or result in measurable water quality improvements. Applications should be submitted by April 30, 2023.

A Council member asked if PFOA's have any recent standards EPA is looking at?

- Liz Booth (GAEPD) answered that EPA came out with a proposed limit of 4 parts per

trillion on PFOA and PFOS and a hazard index for a mix of four other PFAS compounds. GA EPD will be responding by notifying water utilities of those criteria and developing rules to implement the requirements.

### **Water Quality Committee Report**

Victoria Barrett (Council Member) presented the Water Quality Report from the Water Quality Committee meeting on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023. She mentioned that they reviewed Dissolved Oxygen (DO) and Chlorophyll-a/nutrient issues brought up by the Water Quantity Committee. This involved reviewing portions of Section 3, 5, and 6. They added some language for the potential of a TMDL for Walter F. George and they looked at what that means for fisheries currently. She noted that the Committee added a graph to visualize recent dissolved oxygen water quality data in the Chattahoochee River downstream of Walter F. George. Other graphs added show chlorophyll-a levels and exceedances at two locations in Walter F. George reservoir. Management Practice WQ-8 language was edited to clarify recommendation of encouraging implementation of monitoring *E. Coli* to monitor stream quality. She introduced some questions related to fisheries that the Committee discussed, particularly the relationship between spotted bass and shoal bass.

Discussion Summary:

Liz Booth (GAEPD) mentioned that now is the time to recommend any criteria for water quality since they are currently involved in their Triannual Review. GAEPD reviews criteria first and then develops a TMDL if the criteria are exceeded. EPA has come up with new lake nutrient criteria guidance to review as well.

A Council member asked Liz Booth to comment on the language in the Plan referencing West Point Lake and how GAEPD lowered the lake's chlorophyll-a standards in 2015 and additional studies are not planned at this time.

- Liz Booth mentioned that the data shows that West Point Lake was the only lake that didn't have chlorophyll-a violations in 2015 and she does not recommend lowering the criteria currently.

A Council member asked why the DO levels peak cyclically.

- Liz Booth answered that the dam operation (flow releases) aerates the water, which raises the DO levels in the water. In the summer, when water temperature is higher and flows may be lower, it is harder to meet DO criteria. When water temperature is lower and flows are higher, DO levels downstream of the dam are higher and meet the water quality standard.

Liz Booth mentioned that the chlorophyll-a level patterns in the graphs are weather related (due to storm water discharges) and similar trends have been observed in other lakes in

Georgia besides Walter F. George. Chlorophyll-a levels in the last five years have been higher than in the previous decade and this is believed due to higher rainfall runoff, potentially influenced by climate change. GAEPD may consider reevaluating the criteria based on climate change in light of this additional data in the future.

The group discussed fisheries questions and Bryant Bowen advised that spotted bass are non-native and hybridizing with Shoal Bass. Several graphs documenting degree of hybridization based on studies were shown and discussed.

A Council member asked if DNR is concerned about the hybridization of the Shoal Bass?

- Brent Hess (DNR) mentioned that they are concerned as the State's desire is to preserve conditions for native fish to thrive where possible.

The group discussed fish migration and extent of Alabama Shad. Rob Weller advised that there are multiple locks and dams which constrain migration.

The group discussed the change in conditions for fish with the planned removal of dams on the Chattahoochee, and Brent Hess noted that dam removal will tend to connect and likely increase Shoal Bass populations.

### **Georgia Power Langdale and Riverview Dams Decommissioning**

Courtenay O'Mara (GA Power) presented information on the Langdale and Riverview Dams, which are downstream of West Point. Both Projects are run-of-river and flow regime is dependent upon upstream Corps' West Point Dam. She described the multiple environmental and physical studies that have been performed and described the agency support through this process. This decommissioning is actually a joint USFWS and GA Power project. She discussed that the FERC licensing decommissioning application was submitted in September 2022 and the submittals are being finalized to incorporate comments now, targeting FERC approval in the third quarter 2023, and hopefully USACE 401 permit and construction plans by the end of 2023. This would allow decommissioning construction activities in 2024 (work will be restricted to the June through October timeframe to minimize river impacts).

Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked about river access for recreation?

- Courtenay advised that the Riverview powerhouse would be removed, but the Langdale powerhouse would be kept as a historic structure. Part of the Langdale dam will be left in place to keep water flow toward the Alabama riverbank for water quality purposes due to an existing discharge. Langdale property would ultimately used for public access and it will be possible in the future to canoe unimpeded through this section of the Chattahoochee.

### **Management Practice Prioritization**

Courtney Cooper (GWPPC) introduced the prioritization activity for the Management Practices. Council members were encouraged to list the three Management Practices they felt should be prioritized. Following the exercise, the group discussed that **IU1, IU3, and WQ1** were selected as the Management Practices that had the most interest by members to be prioritized in the Plan.

### **ACFS Drought Exercise Overview and Discussion**

Courtney Cooper (GWPPC) summarized the ACF Stakeholders exercise that took place on March 1<sup>st</sup> in Eufaula, AL. The exercises ran through multiple drought scenarios to engage Alabama, Georgia, and Florida, as well as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in discussions surrounding their drought management planning. ACF Stakeholders are aiming to repeat the exercise in 2024.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member stated that the exercise was a great opportunity for the different states and federal entities to have an open conversation, which has not occurred in some time.

Chris Manganiello (Chattahoochee Riverkeeper) mentioned that having those three states all in the same room with the Corps communicating was a great indicator of their cooperation, especially after the litigation. ACFS plans to continue these exercises.

### **Water Quantity Committee Report**

James Emery (Council Member) provided the Council with an overview of the recommended Water Quantity updates to the Water Control Manual language in Section 3 and discussed the Alternative Population Scenario Model runs. James mentioned that when looking at the alternative population model runs, the results didn't change very much in the BEAM Model while using the alternative population projections for Harris and Muscogee County. It was noted during the Committee meeting that the changes between the results show the impacts on stream flows are minuscule and that the Committee members reviewed this material and were satisfied. The Committee also added a new Recommendation to the State (#11) for navigation based on Council discussion in December and the Committee recommends it. Lastly, James covered the updates to the Water Control Manual portion of Section 3. Most of the changes for this Section were from updating the language in the Plan to reflect the new WCM and some edits were also made based on EPD's review.

### **Discussion of Outstanding Planning Questions**

Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC) covered the discussion of outstanding planning questions with the Council. She mentioned the Table 6.1 for the Management Practices has changed in format since the last Council meeting. The table now includes details addressing responsible parties

and implementation timeframes (short-term and long-term). The wastewater discharge challenges presented in Section 3 and 5 have also had formatting changes based on GAEPD input. The wastewater volume shortages have been removed from the tables and additional language has been included explaining a challenge is not considered substantial unless the percentage of time that the instream flow fell below the 7Q10 value is greater than 10%. She also noted the Recommendation to the State #3 has had revisions incorporated to match the committee's past discussion and their comment letter submitted to Metro District this past year. Lastly, she gave an update on the new Joint Recommendation #3, which has a pending review by the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Council but has been approved by Middle Chattahoochee and Upper Flint Councils.

#### Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked for some background on the Recommendation to the State #11 and mentioned that the language should be altered to suggest the State advocate for the necessary funding, rather than the State provides the necessary funding.

- It was answered that more background on Navigation and information relating to Recommendation #11 can be found in Section 3.2 and the Team plans to incorporate the edited language in the Plan.

#### **Public Comment**

Laura Schneider (RVRC) noted that grant application and management services assistance can be provided by the Commission and encouraged folks to reach out with interest in potential projects.

#### **Regional Water Plan Draft Update Approval**

Mac Moyer made a motion to approve, and Ken Van Horn seconded.

All Council members were in favor for moving the draft forward to GAEPD.

#### **Next Steps in Plan Review and Revision**

Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC) announced that the next Council meeting will be held on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023, which will be the final meeting. We will be looking to incorporate comments from the Council input and public review during this meeting before the draft is submitted for adoption by the EPD Director.

The group discussed potential locations for the final meeting in June. One suggestion was to consider organizing the meeting to include a Walter F. George Reservoir tour; Bobby Moore at USACE was mentioned as a possible contact for exploring this potential.

John Asbell highlighted a recent STEAM event organized by the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper and complimented them on their hosting of similar events.

**Adjourn**

Chairman Davis thanked everyone for their attendance and participation before adjourning the meeting.

**Council Members Attending March 16, 2023 Meeting**

John Asbell	Harry Lange
Victoria Barrett	Ed Moon
Steve Davis	Mac Moye
James Emery	Kenneth Van Horn
Jim Hayes*	Gardiner Garrard

**Other Attendees**

Kristin Rowles (GWPPC)*	Brent Hess, GADNR
Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC)	Taylor McDaniel, UGA Extension
Courtney Cooper (GWPPC)	Paul McDaniel, Ga Forestry Commission
Steve Simpson (B&V)	Tony Dodd, GA Power
Rob Bocarro (B&V)	Dawson Ingram, GA Power
Jason Howard (B&V)	Laura Schneider, RVRC
Clete Barton (GAEPD)	Melissa Crabbe, Southern Company
Kelli-Ann Schrage (GAEPD)	Courtenay O'Mara, Southern Company
Chris Manganiello (Chattahoochee Riverkeeper)	

\*By videoconference