



Meeting Summary

Lower Flint Ochlockonee Regional Water Council
The Candy Room at the Riverfront Resource Center
Albany, GA
March 17, 2023

Welcome

Steve Simpson (B&V) welcomed the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee (LFO) Council members and members and attendees introduced themselves. Steve then began the meeting by reviewing the agenda. He mentioned that Vincent Falcione will be stepping down from the Council and recognized his long-term participation in the Council. Meeting materials are posted on the Council's website.

Chair's Report

Chairman Royal was unable to attend this meeting but recommended Murray Campbell to preside as chair in his absence. Murray welcomed the members and observers today and thanked those involved in the previous Committee meetings.

Planning Timeline and Neighboring Council Coordination

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 reports from the Water Quality and Quantity Committee. Lastly, they considered recommendations from the Inter-Council Coordination Committee. Meagan also mentioned how the Project Team met with the Middle Ocmulgee & Suwannee-Satilla Councils to address any key Council issues and discussions that might cross Council boundaries. She then noted that this will be our last meeting in this Planning cycle before the submission of the draft Regional Water Plan.

EPD Updates

Jennifer Welte (GAEPD) introduced Clete Barton (GAEPD) who will work with Jennifer on the Council planning for the State. She 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 29th and GAEPD will advertise a Public Notice on March 31st. This will begin a 45-day public comment period on the draft plan that will end on May 15th. 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 23rd. The final step in the process is for the EPD Director to adopt the plan by June 30, 2023.

Jennifer 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.

Water Quantity Committee Report

Murray Campbell (Council Member) provided the Council with an overview of the recommended Water Quantity updates to Sections 6 – Management Practices and Recommendations to the State. The Committee had discussed the following key changes: adding a new Management Practice SF7 about a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) based on the Recommendation to the State WP-7, adding language to the Plan to acknowledge Florida's use of the Floridan Aquifer affects shared water resources, and addressing a question asked to GAEPD if the GA Pacific facility has any storage options available to address their water supply challenge. The group noted GAEPD's response that the on-site storage at the facility is fairly small in comparison to the challenge.

Discussion Summary:

The Council decided on removing Recommendation to the State WP-7 due to redundancy with the newly added Management Practice SF7.

GA-FIT Update & ACFS Drought Exercise Report

Mark Masters (GWPPC) provided an update on the Georgia Flow Incentive Trust (GA-FIT). The GA-FIT voluntary irrigation suspension auction began a few years ago now and they are researching ways to provide drought response options in GA, more specifically, looking into what farmers are willing to accept in a dollar amount per acre for suspending irrigation on their farm. Funding for the GA-FIT auction continued this year and they held the auction in person and online from February 20-24, 2023. The auction looks at farmer's bidding on three different contract options including:

- Option A: If you pay me _____ dollars per acre, I agree not to irrigate this field at all until after December 31.

- Option B: If you pay me _____ dollars per acre, I won't apply more than six inches of irrigation per acre on this field until after December 31.
- Option C: I will accept an up-front payment of \$35 per acre and agree for this field to be placed in a pool of fields on which irrigation could be interrupted during the remainder of the calendar year depending on stream conditions. If the flow at the USGS gauge at Milford falls below 50 cfs on a seven-day average before August 15th, at that time I will suspend irrigation on this field until after December 31 if you pay me an additional _____ dollars per acre.

This year 54 farmers with over 11,000 acres in the project area (Ichawaynochaway Creek Basin) participated. Mark mentioned that this is outstanding participation, and they are currently sorting through the data and finalizing the last contracts with farmers.

Option A was randomly selected this year for the project, meaning farmers will suspend their irrigation until December 31st of this year. Contracting with farmers that participated is prioritized by analyzing their bid amount, location, source, acreage, and other factors. Policy recommendations and additional data relating to the effects of executing different contracts and outcomes from this project are anticipated to come back to the GA-FIT Advisory Board. Mark mentioned that this year they had more surface water irrigators and less farmers using groundwater to participate than last year.

Mark then gave a report on GA-FIT's Drought SWAP project, which continues to move along on schedule. They previously had their application period in December and an Advisory Board meeting January. Contracts are currently out for 16 monitoring wells, and they are still in the process of working through the preliminary applications and prioritizing sites for implementation, which will take place over the next 6 months. He mentioned that the next Advisory Board meeting is set to take place on May 2nd at the Jones Center. The Project Team has recently submitted a grant proposal to the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). An HCP planning grant will allow us to look at more stream flow metrics in the project area.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked when we will know about the HCP grant decision.

- Mark answered that we should have an answer by this summer, possibly July.

A Council member asked if we have a map of who is signed on for monitoring wells and the source switching included in Drought SWAP.

- Mark answered that we have a pretty good distribution between monitoring well locations. The source switching wells for farmers will take place mostly in the Kinchafoonee-Muckalee and the Ichawaynochaway because that is where most of

the surface water is located in the project area.

A Council member asked what long-term maintenance will exist for the installed wells in terms of the cost-share program with Drought SWAP.

- Mark mentioned that long term maintenance is not specifically in the funding for Drought SWAP because funding includes a 90% cost share for the installation of the well and pumping on the farm. Monitoring wells will be a little bit different since the team will be in charge of keeping up with the maintenance on those.

A Council member asked if there were any surprises from the auction to share?

- Mark noted that he was still excited about the participation, even though it was lower than the previous year because it's a high percentage of the project area. He said he would have liked to see more of the groundwater folks participate this year as well. Lastly, he noted that the auction bids ranged anywhere between \$150-2500 per acre.

Mark then summarized the ACF Stakeholders exercise that took place on March 1st 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. The exercise simulated different severities of drought within the ACF Basin, which the different entities present had to then propose management actions or procedures that could mitigate the drought impacts to their region. The ACF Stakeholders are aiming to repeat the exercise in 2024.

Review Joint Recommendation 3

Mark Masters (GWPPC) introduced the Joint Recommendation #3 that was discussed in past Council meetings and presented a new language that was approved by the Upper Flint and Middle Chattahoochee Councils. The language is as follows:

"Recommend proactive engagement among Georgia, Alabama, and Florida to collaborate on opportunities to improve planning for shared water resources in the ACF Basin."

Discussion Summary:

A Council member noted that they agree with the proposed wording.

Murray Campbell made a motion to approve the Joint Recommendation and it was seconded. All members were in favor of the Recommendation.

The draft Plan will be updated to include the newly approved Joint Recommendation.

Management Practice Prioritization Activity

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, Council members discussed that **SF2, SF7, and DM1** were selected as the Management Practices that had the most interest by members to be prioritized in the Plan.

Outstanding Planning Questions

Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC) covered the discussion of outstanding planning questions with the Council. She mentioned that the BEAM Model was recently updated by GAEPD and those updates have been reflected in the Plan draft. Some minor updates were seen in Table 3-3 and Table 5-1 in the Plan relating to the GA Pacific Cedar Springs Facility results, as well as in Table 3-4 and 5-2 relating to the Smithville WPCP facility. Meagan then mentioned that Table 6.1 on 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%. A council member asked where this guidance came from; Steve Simpson noted that the 7Q10 statistical flow is statistically expected to occur once every ten years, which is why a value near 10% is expected.

Public Comment

Brian Wordham, GEFA, presented some information about GEFA. He noted that their Water First program incentivizes communities to achieve this designation, as a lower loan interest rate is available for Water First communities. Loans and grants can be used for water supply and distribution and wastewater collection and treatment infrastructure to increase water resiliency in GA. He plans to return to future meetings to provide a formal presentation from GEFA; he intends to focus on projects in southwest Georgia. He also noted their Interest Rate Reduction project for Disadvantaged Communities (applies to new loans and old loans) is currently accepting applications.

Approval of the Draft Plan for Public Review

Murray Campbell requested a motion; David Dixon made a motion to approve the draft plan and it was seconded by John Heath. The motion was approved by consensus.

Next Steps in Plan Review and Revision

Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC) announced that the next Council meeting will be held on June 15th,

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.

Adjourn

Murray Campbell thanked everyone for attending and the meeting was adjourned.

Council Members Attending March 17, 2023 Meeting

Chris Addleton	Calvin Perry
Murray Campbell	Jay Smith
Marc DeMott	Mark Spooner
Fred Dent	Steve Sykes
David Dixon	Cory Thomas
John Heath	
Connie Hobbs	
Michael McCoy	

Other Attendees

Mark Masters (GWPPC)	Brian Wordham, GEFA
Kristin Rowles (GWPPC)*	<i>*By videoconference</i>
Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC)	
Courtney Cooper (GWPPC)	
Steve Simpson (B&V)	
Rob Bocarro (B&V)	
Jason Howard (B&V)	
Jennifer Welte (GAEPD)	
Clete Barton (GAEPD)	
Bert Early (GFC)	
Ashley Bailey (GA Milk Producers, Inc.)	
Henning Haaren (GA Milk Producers, Inc.)	