



## **Meeting Summary**

### **Upper Flint Regional Water Council**

**Flint Energy Conference Room, Reynolds, GA**

**June 9, 2023**

### **Welcome & Introductions**

Rob Bocarro (B&V) welcomed everyone for attending and introduced the Council members and council support team. Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC) then reviewed the agenda and objectives for the meeting.

### **Chair's Report**

Chairman Chase opened the meeting with a welcome and thanked all the Council members for their engagement and work on the Regional Water Plan. He noted that he had a discussion with Raines Jordon on Council leadership. They both noted that they have enjoyed working on the Council, but feel it is time for new leadership. Officer elections will be held immediately following the report.

### **Council Leadership Election**

Chairman Chase opened the floor for nominations for Chair and Vice Chair.

A Council member nominated Adam Graft for Chair and Gordon Rogers for Vice Chair.

Following a written ballot, Adam Graft was elected new Chairman, with Gordon Rogers as the Vice Chair. Adam thanked the Council for having healthy discussions with consensus.

### **EPD Updates**

Johanna Smith (GAEPD) presented on the Regional Water Plan Seed Grant, which is now accepting applications until October 31, 2023. The Seed Grant provides up to \$75,000 per project to implement Regional Water Plans, with a cost-share of 60% state funds and 40% local match. Seed Grants require a letter of support from the Water Council and a pre-application meeting. This year, all applications must be submitted through the RWP Seed Grant Application Portal. She encouraged others to reach out to Joyce McClain or herself for further information.

*Discussion Summary:*

A Council member asked if Seed Grants only include local governments. Johanna noted that eligible recipients of the Regional Water Plan Seed Grant funds include local, regional and State units of government, local authorities which operate local government service delivery programs, regional commissions, resource conservation and development councils, local school systems, State college and universities, and State agencies.

A Council member asked if unified Governments are eligible to participate? Johanna answered that local, regional and State units of government such as a city or county government and State agencies are all eligible recipients.

Chairman Adam Graft asked if Gordon Rogers would reach out to let others know by phone calls that the Seed Grant application is open and would be a good opportunity for water quality projects in the region.

**Frost Protection Permitting**

Ania Truszczynski (GAEPD) thanked the Council for letting her discuss the new proposed Frost Protection Permitting framework with them. She began by describing Subarea 4 of the ACF Basin, which is an area of high interconnectivity between the Flint River and the Floridan Aquifer. Dr. Truszczynski then covered a timeline of agricultural water withdrawal permitting and the permitting moratorium. New permits for frost protection permits are currently not an option for farmers in the Lower Flint River Basin because of the current permit moratorium but crops like blueberries and citrus cannot be cultivated successfully without frost protection, which requires large amounts of water. Dr. Truszczynski noted that because water use under the proposed Frost Protection Permitting framework would be limited to the recharge season and limited in quantity, the issuance of permits should have a negligible effect on flows. She mentioned that this would be a good first step in re-evaluating the permitting approach for agricultural water withdrawals in the Lower Flint River Basin. GAEPD plan to begin accepting applications for Frost Protection Permits from the Floridan Aquifer in the moratorium area in September of this year. In the proposed framework, surface water withdrawals would not be permitted for Frost Protection Permits, and for Floridan aquifer water withdrawals, frost protection permitting would be permitted only in the “green zones” defined by the 2006 Flint River Basin Plan. Dr. Truszczynski mentioned that GAEPD is currently gathering feedback on the proposed framework from stakeholders. She said that a stakeholder meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 21, in Albany. Written comments are being collected through June 30.

*Discussion Summary:*

A Council member asked if GAEPD has information on interest or need for frost protection in the “red” and “yellow” zones. Dr. Truszczynski answered that they are seeking input on whether there is such interest during the public comment period.

A Council member commented that GAEPD has the ability to model surface water flows and aquifer contributions to baseflow and asked whether GAEPD could they model the effect of frost protection withdrawals in red and yellow zones. Dr. Truszczynski answered that GAEPD does not know the level of interest for frost protection withdrawals in those areas, but when they do, they will model the potential effect. Dr. Truszczynski noted that in discussions to date, permitting in the green zones seems like a good first step to many stakeholders.

A Council member commented that it may be beneficial to also consider allowing surface water use for Frost Protection Permits since it may be a small number of users. Dr. Truszczynski mentioned that if the Council is aware of anyone reliant on surface water who might be interested in Frost Protection Permits to let GAEPD know.

A Council member asked if there are other crops included (e.g., strawberries) or withdrawals from other aquifers. Dr. Truszczynski answered that the Floridan Aquifer is the only aquifer of interest for the framework because of the current permit moratorium on withdrawals. There is also currently a moratorium on Clayton Aquifer withdrawals, due to adverse impact. Deeper aquifers do not have a restraint on permits.

A Council member asked if a farmer who would need to use surface water for potential frost protection withdrawal could receive priority consideration for that use if they are working with GA-FIT (i.e., installing a deep aquifer well for drought use). Dr. Truszczynski answered that GAEPD is seeking to develop a robust permitting program that enables any eligible farmer equal ability to obtain coverage.

Dr. Truszczynski noted that the Council's comments and questions will help to guide next steps, and GAEPD plans to be fully transparent during the process and respond to questions thoughtfully.

### **Public Comment**

No public comment from today's meeting.

### **Regional Water Plan Review**

Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC) acknowledged and thanked those who submitted a letter to the Council during the draft Regional Water Plan Public Comment period, which ended on May 15<sup>th</sup>. Of those who submitted comment letters were Peter Maholland (USFWS), Brandon Baker (GADNR), and Amy Rosemond (UGA). GAEPD has drafted a response letter to Peter Maholland and Amy Rosemond's comments on behalf of the Council since these individuals sent their comments to all 10 Regional Water Planning Councils.

Considering Mr. Maholland's comments, the Council indicated that it wishes to invite a presentation from USFWS about wildlife planning considerations at a future Council meeting. They also decided on adding a reference to the relevant websites which contain the up-to-date

numbers of species of Conservation Concern as well as the species and habitats protected by the Endangered Species Act in Section 2 of the Plan.

With respect to the comments from Mr. Baker, the Council wishes to incorporate Brandon Baker's suggestions for edits in Section 3 of the Plan by adding reference to DNR as the manager of important recreational fisheries in the region and updating the list of fish.

The Council approved GAEPD's draft response to Dr. Rosemond regarding her concerns.

During discussion of the plan, a Council member commented on the need to address Information Need #12 in Section 6 of the Plan. The Council member asked to form a sub-committee tasked with discussing and working towards achieving the goals set out in that information need.

### **Approval of the Plan for Submission to GAEPD**

A motion was made by the Chairman to approve the Regional Water Plan, with the edits discussed during today's meeting, for submission to the GAEPD Director. The motion was seconded and approved with consensus.

### **Next Steps**

Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC) noted to the Council that the Final Updated Plan should be submitted to GAEPD by Friday, June 23, 2023. The GAEPD Director will adopt plans by June 30<sup>th</sup>. She also mentioned that Council Members will be receiving email communication regarding scheduling of the next Council meeting. She will also reach out to the Council to form the sub-committee to discuss Information Need #12 as discussed by the Council during the Regional Water Plan Review in today's meeting.

### **Adjourn**

Chairman Graft thanked the Council for their discussion and participation today and adjourned the meeting.

### **Council Members Attending June 9, 2023 Meeting**

Michael Bowens*	Brandon Lewis
Gene Brunson	Gordon Rogers
Donald Chase	Butch Turner
Brad Ellis*	Teel Warbington
Beth English	Joel Wood*
Adam Graft	

Jack Holbrook  
Terrell Hudson  
Raines Jordan\*

**Other Attendees**

Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC)  
Kristin Rowles (GWPPC)\*  
Rob Bocarro (B&V)  
Jason Howard (B&V)  
Ania Truszczynki (GAEPD)  
Johanna Smith (GAEPD)  
Clete Barton (GAEPD)\*  
Laura Schneider (RVRC)  
Madison Luke (UGA Extension)  
Bert Early (GFC)

*\*By videoconference*