



Meeting Summary

Lower Flint Ochlockonee Regional Water Council

UGA Stripling Irrigation Research Park

Camilla, GA

June 15, 2023

Welcome

Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC) welcomed everyone and thanked participants for attending. She thanked Council member, Calvin Perry, for allowing the Council to host their meeting at the UGA Stripling Irrigation Research Park. She reviewed the agenda with the Council and mentioned the main objectives for the day were to approve the Regional Water Plan for submission to GAEPD, elect Council leadership, and learn about and discuss proposed frost protection permitting.

Chair's Report

Chairman Royal welcomed everyone and reviewed the agenda with the Council. He thanked the Council members for their attendance considering the severe storms from the night before and welcomed Paul Fry to the meeting. He advised that the purpose of the meeting was to approve the plan update.

EPD Updates

Jennifer Welte (GAEPD) presented information regarding the Seed Grants program; the next window for applications will be announced in July, and applications will be accepted through October 31, 2023. Seed Grants provide up to \$75,000 per project to address water quality issues and support the Regional Water Plans management practices, 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. Jennifer encouraged others to reach out to Joyce McClain or herself for further information.

Ms. Welte also noted to the Council that once the Regional Water Plan is submitted to GAEPD,

the Director plans to adopt it by June 30th.

Frost Protection Permitting

Ania Truszczynski (GAEPD) thanked the Council for letting her discuss the new 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 current permit moratorium. New permits for frost protection water withdrawals are currently not an option for farmers in the Lower Flint River Basin because of the moratorium but crops like blueberries and citrus cannot be cultivated successfully without frost protection, which requires large amounts of water. Dr. Truszczynski then 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 plans to begin accepting applications for Frost Protection Permits from the Floridan Aquifer in the moratorium area in September 2023. Under the proposed framework, surface water would not be permitted for frost protection use, and for Floridan aquifer water withdrawals, frost protection permitting would occur 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 with stakeholders and gauging interest. She noted 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 mentioned that they would have to use surface water for frost protection of their blueberries since groundwater is not available in the vicinity of the farm. Dr. Truszczynski clarified that existing surface water permits allow for irrigation but a frost protection permit will be required for new withdrawal applications.

A Council member asked if a frost protection permit could be issued if the farmer has a Drought SWAP well that could be used during low flow conditions. Dr. Truszczynski said that this was a good question to consider in the framework. A Council member commented that potential flow benefit would need to be considered for Drought SWAP.

One member commented that citrus is expanding in the region. The group discussed that the estimates of existing citrus vary.

Some Council members asked that the Council add a new information need about Frost

Protection Permitting to its plan in the Recommendations to the State. (See proposed text later in meeting.)

A Council member asked if frost protection is used on any vegetables in the region. Some members noted that they are not aware of other such crops. One member noted that olive trees require frost protection, but that they might use other methods (e.g., fans). Dr. Truszczynski noted that GAEPD is seeking input on other possible crops that need frost protection.

A meeting observer commented that farmers are very interested in frost protection for blueberries and citrus. The observer commented that he believes there is plenty of water to support expansion with the proper application of new technology. Further, he suggested that there was a need to support farmers in developing increased storage/reservoirs (e.g., farm ponds) for farmers with low-capacity wells.

A Council member noted support for the work GAEPD is doing with Frost Protection Permitting but an interest in seeing more information gathered.

GA-FIT Update

Murray Campbell presented updates from the previous GA-FIT Advisory Board meeting on May 2nd. Murray noted that monitoring test wells 5 and 6 have been installed, and there has been some progress in prioritization for Drought SWAP production well locations based on applications submitted. Dr. Truszczynski (GAEPD) presented some of the first steps for frost protection to the advisory board. Mr. Campbell mentioned that the Advisory Board reviewed modeling results for a hypothetical Drought SWAP scenario with GAEPD, and the results showed a potential benefit in Ichawaynochaway Creek from 4.5 cfs to around 64 cfs streamflow at the Milford gauge. Mr. Campbell lastly mentioned the ultimate goal of GA-FIT is a Habitat Conservation Plan, which would reduce uncertainty over compliance through an incidental take permitting under the Endangered Species Act.

Public Comment

Ryan Thompson, Georgia Association of Groundwater Professionals/Harvey Well Drilling: Mr. Thompson noted possible concerns over how conservation for freshwater mussels might affect farmers that need water. A Council member responded that it would be helpful to share more information about the proposed Habitat Conservation Plan. Mr. Thompson indicated concern over compliance letters sent to farmers and possible impacts on access to water. A Council member responded that GAEPD is following up to address these concerns. Dr. Truszczynski (GAEPD) said it is not GAEPD's intention to turn off water for these farmers, but to consciously examine permit information where needed. Mr. Thompson commented that for some permits, acreage requirements are incorrect. Dr. Truszczynski noted that GAEPD is working on correcting errors in historical information, and it is a reason why they have been requesting information

from permit holders. A Council member commented that ironing out discrepancies and errors in existing permits will help us to move forward with more wells where possible based on better information.

A Council member asked GAEPD about how ag water permits are being addressed when the land is converted to solar farms. Cliff Lewis (GAEPD) answered that they are considered inactive permits that can be reactivated upon request of the permittee.

Regional Water Plan Review

Courtney Cooper (GWPPC) acknowledged and thanked those who submitted comment letters to the Council during the draft Regional Water Plan public comment period, which ended on May 15th. Comment letters were received from Peter Maholland (USFWS) and Amy Rosemond (UGA). GAEPD has drafted a response letter to Peter Maholland and Amy Rosemond 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.

The Council approved GAEPD's draft response to Mr. Maholland and Dr. Rosemond. Council members also suggested the addition of some language to the draft response letter to invite Dr. Rosemond to future meetings and ask if she has any data or resources that could benefit the Council regarding water quality.

The Council then discussed Management Practice SF-4, regarding Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR). A Council member commented and expressed several concerns over ASR and proposed the deletion of SF-4 from the plan. The Council discussed this proposal, and one member suggested that instead of deleting reference to ASR completely, that the management practice be modified to become an information need in the Recommendations to the State (Section 6.3). The following possible text was considered for the information need:

Continue to evaluate the potential impacts of Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR). ASR is not currently used in Georgia, and a recent study to evaluate potential use of ASR in the region demonstrated inadequate groundwater productivity to support implementation at that study site. ASR has been suggested as a potential tool for use at specific sites in this water planning region where it might benefit flow augmentation. It could be used to withdraw and store surface water during periods of high flow and provide augmentation for flows in dry periods. The feasibility of ASR projects can vary

greatly depending on location and condition of the receiving aquifer. Potential water quality considerations are an important consideration. The Council recommends that any ASR proposal be thoroughly evaluated for its environmental and other impacts.

The removal of Management Practice SF-4 and the addition of the above-stated information need was approved by the Council by consensus.

In follow-up to its earlier discussion about adding an information need regarding frost protection permits, the Council considered the following text for the information need:

GAEPD should continue to monitor the need for and potential impact of frost protection water use in the LFO region. GAEPD is currently considering (at the time of plan adoption) new permits for limited use of the Floridan Aquifer for frost protection purposes. More information will inform future management of this water use.

This information need was adopted by the Council by consensus and will be added to the Plan.

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 by consensus. Jennifer Welte thanked the Council Members for their hard work on the Plan update process.

Council Leadership Election

Chairman Royal opened the floor for nomination for Chair and Vice Chair.

A Council member nominated Murray Campbell for Chair and Connie Hobbs for Vice Chair.

Murray Campbell and Connie Hobbs were elected by the Council as Chair and Vice Chair by a spoken consensus vote.

Next Steps

Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC) noted to the Council that the Final Updated Plan would be submitted to GAEPD by Friday, June 23, 2023. The GAEPD Director will adopt plans by June 30th. She also mentioned that Council members will receive email communication regarding scheduling of the next Council meeting.

UGA Stripling Irrigation Research Park

Calvin Perry (Council member) presented an introduction to the UGA Stripling Irrigation Research Park (SIRP). He noted that the main goal at SIRP is in finding more efficient ways to apply irrigation water. The SIRP provides outreach with irrigation efficiency such as soil

moisture sensor, low pressure sprinklers, and variable rate irrigation. A Council member noted that the SIRP provided a great influence in the ACF litigation by providing information on the irrigation efficiency technology used within the State. The council noted their appreciation for Dr. Perry's work.

Adjourn

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

Council Members Attending June 15, 2023 Meeting

Chris Addleton	Connie Hobbs
Steve Bailey	Calvin Perry
Murray Campbell	Richard Royal
Marc DeMott	Steve Sykes
David Dixon	Jimmy Webb
Hugh Dollar*	
John Heath*	

Other Attendees

Kristin Rowles (GWPPC)*	Cliff Lewis (GAEPD)
Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC)	Jennifer Welte (GAEPD)*
Courtney Cooper (GWPPC)	Wei Zeng (GAEPD)
Steve Simpson (B&V)	Charles Stripling
Rob Bocarro (B&V)	Ryan Thompson (Georgia Association of Groundwater Professionals)
Jason Howard (B&V)	Bryce Trotter (GA Milk Producers, Inc.)*
Ania Truszczynski (GAEPD)	Ashley Bailey (GA Milk Producers, Inc.)
Chris Manganiello (CRK)	Adam Belflower (GA Farm Bureau)
Jake Matthews (GA Farm Bureau)	
Paul Fryer (Congressman Bishop Rep)	

**By videoconference*