



Meeting Summary

Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water Council

USACE Visitor Center, West Point, GA

June 16, 2023

Welcome & Introductions

Courtney Cooper (GWPPC) welcomed the Council members and introduced the project team. The Council members introduced themselves, and the observers in attendance introduced themselves. Courtney reviewed the agenda and main objectives for the day.

Chair's Report

Chairman Davis welcomed the Council members who have been engaged in this planning cycle and especially those who served on subcommittees. He also thanked the project team and those who submitted public comments.

EPD Updates

Kelli-Ann Schrage (GAEPD) presented on the Regional Water Plan 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 implement projects that address water quality and support 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. Kelli-Ann encouraged others to reach out to Joyce McClain or herself for further information or questions.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked how many Seed Grant proposals there have been in the Middle Chattahoochee Region this past year. Kelli-Ann answered that there have been a few submitted, although none have been selected for funding recently.

Public Comment

Chris Manganiello (Chattahoochee Riverkeeper) spoke in the public comment period regarding his letter submitted to the Council from the Public Comment period. He first thanked the Middle Chattahoochee Council for the revision of the Regional Water Plan. He then summarized the main points from his letter generally as water quality, water supply and basin-wide focused. Dr. Manganiello noted that he supports the Council's Recommendations to the State to improve the Water Control Manual with probability-based forecasts. He advised that CRK continues to watch the difference between forecast and use and that this has improved over time. He advised that the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper has water quality concerns regarding harmful algal blooms and identified wastewater assimilation challenges and is supportive of the development of a Walter F. George TMDL.

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 15th. Of those who submitted comment letters were Chris Manganiello (Chattahoochee Riverkeeper), Peter Maholland (USFWS), and Dr. Amy Rosemond (UGA). GAEPD will issue a response letter to Peter Maholland and Amy Rosemond's comments on behalf of the Councils since these individuals sent comments to all 10 Regional Water Planning Councils.

The Council reviewed Dr. Manganiello's comments to the Council and had the following response notes to make in the Plan:

- *Timing, Rule Curves and Probability-based Forecasts*

The Council will amend Management Practice IU-2 with a bullet point offering broader support for forecast informed reservoir operation, which will read:

"Support the evaluation and, as appropriate, adoption of forecast informed reservoir operations at all USACE reservoirs in the Chattahoochee River. Section 8303 of the Water Resources Development Act (2022) included a provision directing the Corps to assess the viability of FIRO in the ACF River basin."

This language was approved with a consensus vote.

- *Prioritization of Storage*

The Council discussed the need to emphasize both the enhancement of existing storage capacity and the potential development of new reservoirs within the Council area, which includes the Tallapoosa basin as well as the Chattahoochee. The Council agreed that no change to the Regional Water Plan wording was desired.

- *Aquifer Storage and Recovery*

The Council discussed the pilot ASR project that was conducted and considered changes to plan language. However, the Council agreed that no change to the Regional Water Plan wording was desired.

- *Reliability Study*

The Council discussed the current language regarding the 2022 Georgia Water Supply Redundancy Study and agreed that no change to the Regional Water Plan wording was desired.

- *Columbus Whitewater Course*

The Council would like to invite presentations to develop an understanding of the FERC relicensing for the North Highland, Oliver, and Goat Rock dams and how their management might affect recreational opportunities. They would also like to invite GA Power to future meetings to present.

- *Evaluate Water Conservation: Per capita water use evaluation and population served data are problematic.*

The Council decided to invite presentations regarding this topic at future meetings.

- *Increase State Funding and Consider adding reference to the Georgia Funders' Forum*

The Council decided to add the following sentence below to Section 7 of the Plan. They approved the following language with consensus.

“The Georgia Funders’ Forum provides useful funding resources for water utilities, local governments, and others implementing management practices at <https://www.ibenvironmental.com/georgia-funders-forum>.”

- *Navigation: The Corps has recently allocated significant funding for lock and dam repair, and this section could reflect that reality.*

The Council approved the following language to be added to the Plan in Section 3, with the possibility to address this topic further in the next planning cycle.

“The USACE has recently allocated \$33 million in funding from the Division’s Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) toward lock repairs in the Middle and Lower Chattahoochee River for Walter F. George (\$18 million) and Jim Woodruff (\$15 million), which will be further addressed in the next Regional Water Planning cycle.”

The Council reviewed Mr. Maholland’s comments to the Council and had the following

discussion points:

- The Council decided to add a footnote reference in Section 2 of the Plan to the websites that contain up-to-date numbers of species of Conservation Concern and of species and habitats protected under the Endangered Species Act.
- They approved of the language in GAEPD's draft response letter, specifically to invite presentations from USFWS to future Council meetings.

The Council reviewed Dr. Rosemond's comments to the Council and approved of GAEPD's draft response letter and would like to add language to invite Dr. Rosemond to future Council meetings.

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 unanimous Council consensus.

Next Steps

The Council's Regional Water Plan will be updated by the council support team and submitted to GA EPD by June 23. The target date for approval of the plan by GA EPD's Director is June 30. Council members will be advised when future Council meetings are scheduled; Council members were encouraged to suggest topics of interest for future meeting presentations.

Introduction to Dam Facility and Overview Tour

Jay Jamison (USACE) presented on the ACF River Basin and West Point Lake. The ACF River Basin is over 19,500 square miles, with five U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) reservoirs. Within the ACF Basin, Lake Lanier has a lot of storage capacity, but it takes a long time for it to reach a full pool. West Point, on the other hand, can fill up to full pool rather quickly. River systems are managed for multiple purposes including hydropower, navigation, water quality and water supply, flood control, fish and wildlife, and recreation. The West Point Project comprises 25,900 acres of water and has annual recreational spending estimated at \$82 million. There were over 2,254,262 visits in 2022. West Point Project has over 1,037 shoreline use permits but could manage up to 4,500 permits. There are 300 bird nesting structures on the land with birding trails. They also take part in prescribed burns with over 2,215 acres treated in 2022. West Point provides on and off-site programs for school groups and civic organizations. West Point Project also hosts fishing tournaments. USACE has multiple lake related programs including forestry, water safety, and volunteers. The Corps operates the hydropower facilities to produce power for SEPA and generated \$5.6M from power sales last year. The presence of West Point has a large economic impact on the region. USACE challenges in managing the facilities include staff recruitment, staff retention, backlog maintenance, and funding to accomplish program needs.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member thanked Jay for presenting on the USACE Projects. He asked how the USACE can further economic development. Jay answered that their goal is to provide a balance of outdoor recreation and outreach. Jay also noted that they rely on their local communities to promote the lakes and get the word out.

Adjourn

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

Council Members Attending June 16, 2023 Meeting

Hannah Anderson	Bill Heath
John Asbell	Harry Lange*
Steve Davis	Ed Moon
James Emery	Kenneth Van Horn
Gardiner Garrard	

Other Attendees

Kristin Rowles (GWPPC)*	Kelli-Ann Schrage (GAEPD)
Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC)	Chris Manganiello (Chattahoochee Riverkeeper)
Courtney Cooper (GWPPC)	Henry Jacobs, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper
Steve Simpson (B&V)	Taylor McDaniel, UGA Extension*
Rob Bocarro (B&V)	Laura Schneider, RVRC
Jason Howard (B&V)	Jay Jamison (USACE)
Jennifer Welte (GAEPD)*	
Clete Barton (GAEPD)	

*By videoconference