



## **Meeting Summary**

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

**By Videoconference**

**November 15, 2023**

### **Welcome & Introductions**

Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC) welcomed the Council members and thanked everyone for attending virtually and introduced the project team. Meagan reviewed the main objectives for the day. She noted that today's meeting was decided to be done by videoconference due to the short agenda length.

### **Chair's Report**

Vice Chairman Harry Lange welcomed everyone and mentioned he looks forward to the discussions that will arise in today's meeting. He thanked the plan commenters for joining and wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

### **EPD Updates**

Kelli-Ann Schrage (GAEPD) presented updates on GAEPD activities during the implementation phase of this Regional Water Plan. Kelli-Ann noted that the FY2024 Seed Grant application period received applications through October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023, and that no seed grant applications were received from the Middle Chattahoochee Water Planning Region. The next funding cycle for seed grants will be announced in July 2024.

Kelli-Ann also discussed updates on the issuance of construction stormwater general permits. She noted a challenge which was brought against the GAEPD's issuance of the construction stormwater general permits, but 2018 permit coverages will remain in effect until the challenge is resolved. The GAEPD also released a draft "Guidance for Requests to Disturb 50 acres or More under the NPDES Construction Stormwater Permits" which will also be accompanied by a virtual meeting on December 7<sup>th</sup> and a comment period ending on December 15<sup>th</sup>.

Kelli-Ann noted that lead service line inventories will be due October 2024 and EPD and GEFA are working on implementing an online system to track submissions. A new drinking water

operator classification was created by Georgia Board of Examiners for an Operator Class III G for operators of groundwater systems serving a population of 1,000-9,999, which GAEPD plans to incorporate into the State drinking water Rules and Regulations.

### **Discussion with Plan Commenters**

*Dr. Amy Rosemond – UGA Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources:*

Dr. Amy Rosemond began her presentation by expressing appreciation for the Regional Water Planning council for their work so far on preparing regional water plans and contributing to regional water policy discussions. Dr. Rosemond began her presentation by urging caution and care in water planning and systems-based solutions. Dr. Rosemond advocates for consideration given to the appointment process to integrate additional interest groups that represent all people in the region and ecological/long term river health. She believes that more caution is needed to have safe, clean, abundant water since there are 61% of rivers and 41% of lakes listed as impaired in Georgia. She additionally noted that there needs to be more attention given to monitoring and planning for extreme events such as droughts, hurricanes, and warmer weather.

Dr. Rosemond discussed a wide range of potential consequences to a warming climate in Georgia and how that may provide further environmental stress to the Chattahoochee River basin. Increased temperatures and nutrients will result in decreased assimilative capacity. Additionally, temperature and nutrient increases will decrease the amount of biological carbon in the river system due to additional harmful algal blooms and fungal and bacterial consumption.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked if there are any major issues that could be easily addressed. Dr. Rosemond answered that work should be done in fecal coliform impairments or investigate Seed Grant funding for addressing biological water quality monitoring.

*Peter Maholland – US Fish and Wildlife Service:*

Peter Maholland highlighted the various service programs provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Georgia. These include protection of endangered species, restoration of wetlands on private property, management of the National Wildlife Refuge System in Georgia, management of the Migratory Bird Program in Georgia, and the operation of the Warm Springs and Chattahoochee National Fish Hatcheries. Peter noted that Georgia had three field offices for FWS; the main office is located in Athens, Georgia and the two sub offices are located in Fort Moore and Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge located near Townsend, Georgia. Peter explained that FWS is working on protecting 5 listed mussels discussed in the Regional Water Plan. The FWS has become involved with the development of the Habitat Conservation Plan

with GAEPD and the GWPPC and is also working with USDA – NRCS to develop an agreement to implement conservation practices.

### **Fact Sheets**

Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC) reviewed the draft Fact Sheets with the Council. This is a summary document of the 2023 Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water Plan that provides background information, key water resources issues addressed by the Council, a summary of the resource assessment results, and lists the high priority management practices. This Fact Sheet will be useful for outreach opportunities for the Council during this implementation phase of the planning cycle. Meagan asked the Council if they could review the document and provide edits or comments to be incorporated before it is published on the Georgia Water Planning Website.

### **GA-FIT Report**

Kristin Rowles (GWPPC) presented updates to the GA-FIT program. She highlighted the membership of the current and previous chairs of both the Upper Flint and Lower-Flint Ochlockonee councils on the GA-FIT advisory board. Kristin announced successes seen with the Voluntary Irrigation Suspension Auction. The auction resulted in about 80 participants last year and 60 participants during this irrigating season. GA-FIT's Drought SWAP is looking to provide farmers with deep groundwater wells as an alternative to their surfaces water sources to use for irrigation withdrawals only during drought periods. Kristin noted they are currently working with landowners in the Lower Flint River Basin to conduct field assessments for contracting. Drought SWAP is looking to install 16 monitoring wells to provide additional data on Claiborne and Cretaceous Aquifers. Drought SWAP is also conducting mussel surveying throughout the project area and obtaining real field-level data at various sites. Kristin also noted they are excited to receive the Habitat Conservation Planning (HCP) Grant from USFWS to do additional habitat work in southwest Georgia. The HCP is being drafted and will be reviewed by the GA-FIT advisory board members soon. Mark also mentioned that bathymetry work is being conducted near Ichawaynochaway Creek to determine flow rates and stream depths.

### **Next Steps**

Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC) noted that the Council should look out for email communications from her about scheduling for the next meeting in the new year. She mentioned that the Team plans to bring a Nutrients & Fisheries Panel discussion to the next meeting, which will provide insight from various speakers including the Wildlife Resources Division (WRD), GAEPD, and Auburn University.

### **Public Comment**

No public comments were made.

**Adjourn**

Vice Chairman Harry Lange thanked everyone for their attendance and participation before adjourning the meeting.

**Council Members Attending November 15, 2023 Meeting**

Hannah Anderson	Bill Heath
John Asbell	Harry Lange
James Emery	Ed Moon
Gardiner Garrard	Victoria Barrett
Mac Moye	Patrick Bowie

**Other Attendees**

Kristin Rowles (GWPPC)	Eddie Zedaker (Westervelt Ecological Services)
Meagan Szydzik (GWPPC)	Adrienne Tickle (Southern Company)
Ania Truszczynski (GAEPD)	Laura Schneider (RVRC)
Rob Bocarro (B&V)	Dr. Amy Rosemond (UGA)
Jason Howard (B&V)	Steven Singler (mc2 Engineers)
Jennifer Welte (GAEPD)	Peter Maholland (USFWS)
Clete Barton (GAEPD)	Chris Manganiello (Chattahoochee Riverkeeper)
Kelli-Ann Schrage (GAEPD)	Dawson Ingram (Southern Company)
Bert Earley (GFC)	
Steve Simpson	