



Meeting Summary

Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water Council

By Videoconference

April 10, 2024

Welcome & Introductions

Meagan Taylor (GWPPC) welcomed the Council members and thanked everyone for attending virtually and introduced the project team. Meagan reviewed the main objectives for the day.

Chair's Report

Chairman Davis thanked the Council members, presenters, and observers for joining us today.

EPD Report

Kelli-Ann Schrage (GAEPD) presented updates regarding the Lead Service Line inventories due in October, noting that an online platform is available for public water systems to submit their inventories, and training has been ongoing on the use of the platform.

Georgia EPD is committed to further developing and revising nutrient-related strategies and plans as per the *2023 Roadmap for Developing and Updating Nutrient Reduction Strategies*. Additionally, EPD has drafted an *Update to the Strategy for Addressing Phosphorus in NPDES Permitting*, which is an update to the 2011 EPD Phosphorus Strategy. A public meeting to discuss this draft was held on April 4, 2024, and the EPD is taking comments via email at EPD.Comments@dnr.ga.gov.

GA-FIT Update

Mark Masters (ASU-GWPPC) provided a series of updates regarding the GA-FIT program including Drought SWAP initiatives and discussed developments and future steps needed to improve resiliency and water resources in the region. Currently, 14 monitoring wells have been installed throughout the project area to provide assessments of groundwater, aquatic ecosystems, and streamflows. The project team and the GA-FIT Advisory Board members have actively been meeting quarterly and working on the draft HCP document. Additionally, the area under the HCP has expanded to include additional areas from subarea 4 in the Lower Flint River Basin and a small area associated with Sawhatchee Creek. There have also been approximately

2,500 dirt road crossings identified in the basin that can result in erosion and sedimentation issues, which can be addressed by the Better Back Roads program.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked what increase in streamflows do they hope to see through GA-FIT? Mark answered that through the extensive modeling done by Wei Zeng (GAEPD), if the project removes surface water withdrawals during drought periods within the project area, the impact on streamflow is an estimated increase of 50-60 cfs. This value is also location dependent within different subbasins.

A Council member asked how the GA-FIT team determined the new covered area boundary? Mark answered this was decided by incorporating subarea 4 and Sawhatchee Creek, in order to include all the critical habitat listed in the region.

A Council member asked at what scale is the project targeting the Chattahoochee River? Mark answered that Sawhatchee Creek is the only area we will see an impact to within the Chattahoochee River basin. The project is mostly focused on the Flint River basin to boost streamflows for freshwater mussels and downstream users.

A Council member asked what the benefit of the project will look like to the average person in 5 years? Kristin Rowles (GWPPC) answered that the overall benefit will be increased sustainability and economic benefits during drought periods. In the Lower Flint River basin, farmers have been exposed to various agricultural water withdrawal permitting regimes and the project aims to provide long-term certainty for farmers, stakeholders, and the ecosystem.

Interstate Chattahoochee River Agreement

Wei Zeng (GAEPD) presented the potential revisions to the Army Corps of Engineers Operation at the Middle Chattahoochee Reach. Under the agreement, the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) will operate dams and reservoirs to obtain a minimum flow target at Columbus, Georgia and Columbia, Alabama. A minimum elevation of 76 feet will also be required for Lake Seminole. The USACE's consideration of the proposal will be under a public comment period and environmental review. Wei noted that the HEC-ResSim Model was utilized for GAEPD's analysis of the revision impacts.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member noted that our Regional Water Plan advocates the USACE to operate to meet minimum flows stated per the FERP license at a frequency of 95% or higher. It was then asked if this agreement between Georgia and Alabama will get us closer to that frequency. Wei answered that they will be able to check the statistics for the region and get back to the Council with those numbers.

A Council member mentioned that meeting flow targets for Columbus looks positive, but the

agreement is still the USACE's final decision.

A Council member asked what the timeline is for finalizing the agreement. Wei stated that the USACE needs to complete a technical evaluation and then the NEPA process.

It was mentioned lastly that the Council should look forward to continuing developments on this agreement at future Council meetings.

Mercury Impact Review

Taruna Vanjani (GAEPD Air Branch) presented updates from the Mercury Impact Review. The GAEPD Air Protection Branch has worked on developing a review of mercury concentrations and impacts in the ecosystems of Georgia. Many mercury emitting plants in the region have been decommissioned or have seen improvements to their mercury capture facilities and report a decrease in mercury emissions from the period of 2006 to 2020. Global and regional effects may contribute to local mercury concentrations in the water as mercury can travel 1,000 miles or more if it is airborne. Many sites from which fish tissue samples were taken have seen a decrease in mercury concentrations. However, many sites have fish tissue mercury concentrations well above the rated criteria (0.3 mg/kg) and some sites have also seen a trend upwards.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member mentioned that it was interesting to see blackwater has such a great impact on mercury availability.

Public Comment

No public comments were made.

Next Steps

Meagan Taylor (GWPPC) asked the Council to let the Team know if there are any additional topics of interest they would like to hear about in future meetings. She also mentioned they should look out for email communications from her about scheduling for the next meeting in the coming months.

Adjourn

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

Council Members Attending April 10, 2024 Meeting

Hannah Anderson

Harry Lange

John Asbell

Ed Moon

Steve Davis

Victoria Barrett

James Emery

Patrick Bowie

Mac Moyer

Matt Windom

Ken Van Horn

Jim Hayes

Other Attendees

Kristin Rowles (GWPPC)

Wei Zeng (GAEPD)

Meagan Taylor (GWPPC)

Laura Schneider (RVRC)

Mark Masters (GWPPC)

Peter Maholland (USFWS)

Rob Bocarro (B&V)

Luke Crosson (UGA Extension)

Jason Howard (B&V)

Chris Manganiello (Chattahoochee
Riverkeeper)

Clete Barton (GAEPD)

Paul McDaniel (GA Forestry Commission)

Kelli-Ann Schrage (GAEPD)

Taruna Vanjani (GAEPD)