



Meeting Summary

Lower Flint Ochlockonee Regional Water Council

Colquitt State Theater

Colquitt, GA

April 11, 2024

Welcome

Meagan Taylor (GWPPC) welcomed everyone and thanked participants for attending. Meagan had the Council members and observers introduce themselves. She then reviewed the agenda and objectives for the day's meeting.

Chair's Report

Chairman Campbell welcomed everyone and expressed his gratitude for the high turnout after the heavy rain events experienced across the region that previous night.

EPD Updates

Jennifer Welte (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.

GAEPD 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, GAEPD 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.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked if there is any discussion to mandate lead lines replacement and any funding available to assist in mandatory replacement? GAEPD noted that EPA is still finalizing the requirements for replacement and federal bipartisan infrastructure funding will be available to aid in replacements.

Agricultural Water Permitting Updates

Dr. Anna Truszczynski provided a set of updates on the progress of varying initiatives to modify or update the agricultural water use permitting process in the region. She first provided an overview of the geography of the region and a recent timeline of permitting updates between the start of agricultural water permitting in Georgia and today. GAEPD is working to develop an Incidental Take Permit through a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) with the Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center at Albany State University to address endangered and threatened mussel species in the Lower Flint River Basin. The inclusion of the GAEPD agricultural water permitting program in the HCP will allow GAEPD to provide new types of permits as well as expanding permits and new compliance tools. Additional capacity will also need to be identified to expand or issue new permits in subarea 4. Dr. Truszczynski noted that there have been some modifications to the 2012 water withdrawal permit suspension. This includes the 2023 frost protection permits and the 2024 modification to remove surface waters in the Ochlockonee and Suwannee basins.

GAEPD is exploring modifying the 2012 suspension to allow for new or modified permits for Floridan Aquifer wells with a few specific conditions in the permits such as:

- 25-year terms
- Irrigation efficacy requirements
- Water conservation plans
- Telemetry
- Restrictions on aesthetic and recreational uses
- Drought Conditions

The drought conditions would be checked daily and would be determined using a composite trigger that would consider readings from 15 USGS monitoring wells in the area and measure them against their 10th percentile water level. If 5 of these wells hit that 10th percentile measurement concurrently, then drought restrictions would be put in place over the entirety of the suspension area. With a drought restriction, the permittee would cease withdrawals from the Floridan aquifer within 24 hours of a restriction being put in place.

GAEPD will host a series of meetings to discuss permit conditions and compliance tools in several locations and invites the Council members to attend and participate. These meetings will be held:

- April 18 – Bainbridge
- May 23 – Albany

- June 13 – Dawson

Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked how the drought restrictions would be communicated to the region. Dr. Truszczynski answered that the GAEPD currently plans to use text, email, and the website to communicate all drought related updates to permittees in the suspension area.

A Council member asked about the measures used to determine that permittees are using their allotted acreage. Dr. Truszczynski proposes that telemetry can be used to monitor water use among permittees to ensure compliance.

A Council member asked about new well locations in relation to the moratorium area. These new wells can be located anywhere in the suspension area.

A Council member also stated that they have a well-to-pond system with the pond being used as an intermediate storage prior to use in irrigation on farmland. The pond in this system would not be considered a recreational or aesthetic pond and would be exempt from such restrictions.

A Council member asked if acreage could be transferred between spouses, to which Dr. Truszczynski responded that acreage transfers will only be allowed for individuals at this time.

A Council member commented that the results of these drought restrictions could have implications for the banking and insurance aspects of the agricultural region. Dr. Truszczynski stated that GAEPD has been in communication with crop insurance companies as the next step in this process to identify possibility for risk management.

GA-FIT Report

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 if the HCP will outline a specific population number needed for protection of freshwater mussels? Mark answered that the HCP will analyze the impact of management practices on flows and look at the impact on the percentage of protected habitat,

rather than a specific target number of mussels.

Colquitt Flow Augmentation Site Report

Chris Metcalf (Coastal Hydrology) discussed the Colquitt Flow Augmentation Site for Spring Creek and took the Council through a virtual tour of the site with pictures. The augmentation site was proposed following the 2011-2012 drought in order to provide options for drought management in the future. The site has the capability to maintain appropriate water flow to the creek for a population of freshwater mussels during appropriate times of low flows. Golden Triangle RC&D has contacts to oversee the maintenance of the flow augmentation infrastructure such as the necessary piping. Chris also noted that when the streamflow reaches a threshold number on the stream gage the pump is then turned on electronically to provide augmentation.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked what is the pumping capability of the augmentation site? Chris answered around 900 gallons per minute across the mussel bed.

Better Back Roads Update

Rhonda Gordon (Golden Triangle RC&D) presented a series of updates regarding the Better Back Roads initiative developed by the Golden Triangle Resource Conservation & Development Council (RC&D). The main constraint on repair and maintenance of dirt roads in the region is a lack of trained professionals who can use the requisite equipment to maintain and repair back roads. To remedy this shortage, Golden Triangle has acquired funding to purchase a classroom trailer as well as a heavy equipment simulator to train staff and other interested individuals in the region.

Technology and Mercury Impact Review

David Dixon (Council Member) presented updates to a mercury study conducted by GAEPD and its impacts to the region. The GAEPD Air Protection Branch has worked on developing a review of mercury concentrations and impacts in the ecosystems of Georgia. The report has indicated approximately a 20% increase in mercury in the Flint River basin between 2006 and 2020 and the more recent levels are over the standards of 0.3 mg/kg. This may be caused by mercury leaching from coal ash ponds or long-distance transport of mercury. Since mercury is very persistent in the air and can be transported up to 1,000 miles or more, it is possible that some of the mercury in the region could come from global or regional sources rather than particularly local sources.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked what species of fish are being affected by mercury impacts? David noted that the primary fish species in our region that was surveyed was the Largemouth Bass.

Next Steps

Meagan Szydzik (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.

Public Comment

No public comments were made.

Adjourn

Chairman Campbell thanked those who attended today's meeting. Due to the recent inclement weather the field trip to the Colquitt Flow Augmentation site was cancelled and presented during the meeting instead. The Chairman also encouraged the Council to attend the upcoming ACF Waters Conference at the end of April.

Council Members Attending November 17, 2023 Meeting

Chris Addleton	Mark Spooner
Murray Campbell	Hugh Dollar
David Dixon	Connie Hobbs
Fred Dent	Richard Royal
Mike Newberry	
Cory Thomas	

Other Attendees

Kristin Rowles (GWPPC)*	Rob Bocarro (B&V)
Meagan Taylor (GWPPC)	Jason Howard (B&V)
Mark Masters (GWPPC)	Clete Barton (GAEPD)
Jayne Smith (City of Colquitt)	Anna Truszczynski (GAEPD)
David Varnadoe (City of Colquitt)	Cliff Lewis (GAEPD)
Jennifer Welte (GAEPD)	Ben Roberts (GA Soil & Water Conservation Commission)
Chris Metcalf (Coastal Hydrology)	

**By videoconference*