



Meeting Summary

Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water Council

Columbus Water Works

November 14, 2024

Welcome & Introductions

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. She also informed the Council on updates occurring to Statewide Regional Water Planning. The Georgia Water Planning & Policy Center is to serve as the new lead contractor for all 10 of the State's Regional Water Councils. There will be more details to follow, but Council members should look forward to more joint meetings with neighboring councils, statewide educational webinars, and implementation assessments on their region. She noted that members should be encouraged to reach out to the team with any ideas on future meeting topics for their region as well as the webinars.

Chair's Report

Chairman Davis thanked the Council members, presenters, and observers for joining us today. He also thanked GAEPD for contracting the lead of the Statewide Regional Water Planning to the Georgia Water Planning & Policy Center.

EPD Report

Kelli-Ann Schrage (GAEPD) introduced the new manager of Regional Water Planning with GAEPD, Russell Nix. Russell mentioned that they plan to hire 2 additional positions to support the water planning process.

Kelli-Ann presented updates for the 2025 Seed Grant Application period, which ended on October 31, 2024. No applications were received in this region, but the next funding cycle will be announced in July 2025.

Kelli-Ann also updated the Council on GAEPD's three construction stormwater general permits that were legally challenged in July 2023. The three NPDES general permits authorize the discharge of stormwater from sites where construction activities occur through July 31, 2028.

The legal challenge was resolved on August 22, 2024.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked how many Seed Grant proposals were submitted statewide. There was a total of 9 proposals that addressed topics like monitoring and updating county water plans.

A Council member asked what the cost share is for the Seed Grants and if the projects are posted for public access. It was answered that the grant is \$75,000 with a cash match and GAEPD posts the accepted projects on their website.

GA-FIT Update

Meagan Taylor (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, 13 monitoring wells have been installed throughout the project area to provide assessments of groundwater, aquatic ecosystems, and stream flows. Recruitment and applications are underway with 150 landowner agreements now in place. Field assessments and prioritization of sites are being conducted with 52 test holes already drilled. GAEPD has also permitted around 25 Landowner Contracts. The project team and the GA-FIT Advisory Board members have actively been meeting quarterly and working on the draft HCP document. There have also been approximately 2,500 dirt road stream crossings identified in the basin that raise concern for erosion and sedimentation issues. This is being addressed currently by the Better Back Roads program where 3 sites have already been remediated. Mark then explained some of the modeling approaches and results for estimating the take of freshwater mussels covered under the Habitat Conservation Plan. Take is calculated by analyzing the differences in the amount and duration of habitat availability under different scenarios of water use.

Better Back Roads Update

Rhonda Gordon and Julie Shutters (Golden Triangle RC&D) presented a series of updates regarding the Better Back Roads initiative developed by the Golden Triangle Resource Conservation & Development Council. 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. Currently, 7 county road departments, 48 county employees, and 8 individuals other than county employees have been trained. Julie mentioned that she works one-on-one with trainees to help them understand and implement Best Management Practices. She also mentioned that this program is not only about water quantity but quality for the wildlife, communities, and ecosystems.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked if there are any enforcement options available for dirt roads. Julie answered that dirt roads are usually exempt from enforcement.

A Council member asked where Golden Triangle RC&D's funding originates. Rhonda mentioned that they receive funding from grants, contracts, and some private funding.

A Council member asked what BMP's are installed on the dirt roads to remedy the issues. Julie explained that they implement four steps: 1) reshape the road structurally, 2) change the bottom of the ditch, 3) build up the road base about 6-7 inches with aggregate, and 3) apply geotextiles to stabilize the road base.

A Council member asked what the cost-benefit is of investing in remediation of the dirt road stream crossing. Julie mentioned that there is a return on investment since the roads do not often need to be reworked and the County employees are trained on BMP's.

The Council noted that they would like to incorporate the encouragement of dirt road stream crossings BMP's in their Regional Water Plan during the next revision process.

Interstate Chattahoochee River Agreement

Breanna Cooch (USACE) presented on the ACF Operational Analysis and Environmental Assessment (ACF Stay Agreement). Breanna described that the agreement has four different flow objects to maintain when the ACF Basin is not in "Drought Zone Operations" as that term is defined in the 2017 ACF Master Manual. The flow objectives are outlined as the following:

1. Maintain a minimum average daily flow of 1,350 cfs over any 7-day period at the gage located on the Chattahoochee River at 14th Street at Columbus, Georgia (Gage No. 02341460).
2. Maintain a minimum average daily flow of 1,350 cfs over any 7-day period at the gage located on the Chattahoochee River at 14th Street at Columbus, Georgia (Gage No. 02341460).
3. Maintain a minimum average daily flow of 1,350 cfs over any 7-day period at the gage located on the Chattahoochee River at 14th Street at Columbus, Georgia (Gage No. 02341460).
4. Maintain a minimum average daily flow of 1,350 cfs over any 7-day period at the gage located on the Chattahoochee River at 14th Street at Columbus, Georgia (Gage No. 02341460).

Discussion Summary:

The Council discussed the flow objectives at length with Breanna and James Hathorne (USACE)

and issued their support of the objectives outlined since they agreed that they come close to what is recommended by the Council in the Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water Plan. In particular, the Council agreed with the phrasing of “any” in Objective #1 to maintain a minimum average daily flow of 1,350 cfs over *any* 7-day period at the gage.

Commercial Navigation

Philip Clayton (Eufaula Barbour County Chamber of Commerce) presented on the ACF Basin’s navigation system. He noted the economic significance to southeast Alabama, southwest Georgia, and north Florida. The ACF is a crucial infrastructure asset to the nation and should be adequately maintained for ecological concerns, health and safety of downstream residences, industrial users, water supply, recreation, and commercial navigation. In 2024 a total of \$101 million has been allocated to the Mobile District and should fund all lock and spillway restorations (Jim Woodruff lock and dam at Lake Seminole, Walter F. George lock and dam at Lake George/Eufaula, and George W. Andrews lock and dam at Colombia). Funding originates from USACE, Congressionally Directed Spending, and the Energy and Water Appropriations Act of 2024.

Discussion Summary:

A Council member asked if barge traffic is mostly seen within a state or out-of-state? Phil answered that most traffic is conducted out of state.

A Council member asked if there are any potential threats of navigation on water quality. Phil mentioned the threats may include fuel leaks or impact to endangered species.

A Council member noted that the economic impact of navigation looks promising but asked if there are any commercial impacts. Phil answered, yes, recreation is only going to increase.

A Council member asked about the work force needed for increased navigation. Phil mentioned that there is a need to change business at the local high school level and provide young people with options. There would also be a need to consider local housing.

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 upcoming meetings.

Adjourn

Chairman Davis thanked everyone for their attendance and participation. He noted that the

support of navigation and BMP's for dirt road crossings are topics to consider in the next Regional Water Plan update.

Council Members Attending November 14, 2024 Meeting

John Asbell	Harry Lange
Patrick Bowie	Mac Moye
Steve Davis	Ken Van Horn
James Emery	Matt Windom

Other Attendees

Meagan Taylor (GWPPC)	Russell Nix (GAEPD)
Sarah Skinner (GWPPC)	Wei Zeng (GAEPD)
Megan Stanley (GWPPC)*	Dawson Ingram (GA Power)
Breanna Cooch (USACE)*	Bert Early (GFC)
James Hathorne (USACE)*	Ben Roberts (GSWCC)
Phil Clayton (Eufaula Barbour County Chamber of Commerce)	Clark Coarsey (GaGWP/Bishop Well)
Clete Barton (GAEPD)	Rhonda Gordon (Golden Triangle RC&D)
Kelli-Ann Schrage (GAEPD)	Julie Shutters (Golden Triangle RC&D)

**By videoconference*