

Memorandum

To: Altamaha Regional Water Planning Council

From: Danielle Honour, CDM Smith

Date: May 23, 2017

*Subject: Altamaha Regional Water Planning Council Meeting 4
Regional Water Plan Review and Revision Process*

This memorandum provides the meeting summary of the Altamaha Regional Water Planning (RWP) Council Meeting 4, held on March 2, 2017 at the Southeastern Technical College in Vidalia, GA. This memorandum provides a summary of the items discussed at the Altamaha RWP Council meeting that was held from approximately 9:30 AM to 3:00 PM and followed the agenda:

1) Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Jeffords welcomed all of the Council Members and meeting attendees, and provided the following introductory remarks:

He stated that he attended the groundwater shared resources sub-committee meeting that was held in Savannah in late January and it is evident that there are issues in Chatham and Effingham Counties related to saltwater intrusion and there are a lot of challenges to overcome. In general, in our region, groundwater is plentiful. We have five surface water gaps - four out of the five are outside of our region. We need to help our neighbors. The water quality in our region is more complicated in trying to understand the natural assimilative capacity without human induced loads. We want growth and to prosper so we need to manage the resource. We have plenty of water; for the most part the water quality is good and we have some surface water gaps. We have a large number of management practices (MPs) which are hard to explain to our constituency. Chairman Jeffords stated he has asked the Planning Contractor (PC) to help with regionalizing the MPs. We need to be conscious of our resource and spread the word, including our elected officials. If there currently isn't a crisis, it is difficult to communicate. If it just stays amongst the Council and we have not spread the word, then we haven't done our job. Chairman Jeffords stated that he talked to Brett Manning with the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission. The little communities that don't have planners, they are left outside the box. We have to plan - if we don't take care of our resource, somebody else will take it. You are passionate about your community, we thank you for that and we need you to communicate this out. How do you best conserve the resource, and how do you disseminate that to your local officials? This is a conservative area that is less dependent on government. If you give the water users the information and discuss with them the need, they will do their fair share.

CDM Smith, the PC, opened up the meeting and asked if the Council Members had any additional questions or comments on the agenda. The Council approved the meeting agenda as well as the minutes from the November 17, 2016 Individual Council Meeting.

2) Regional Water Plan Deliverables

The PC then reviewed a number of draft documents that were sent to the Council prior to the meeting which included the Demand Forecast Technical Memorandum (TM) and updates to Sections 3, 4 and 5 of the Regional Water Plan (RWP).

Question/Comment: A Council Member (CM) stated that there is a water management class in June for local government and local officials will be exposed to the Plan during these classes.

Demand Forecast TM Review

The PC then went on to provide a high level summary of the contents of the Demand Forecast TM and discussed the major changes since the 2011 plan and this update. The main difference is that this update is more in line with a much more modest population growth which is now closer to 11% versus last time when it was closer to 40%. There was also a more modest demand for thermal electric energy needs. Mark Master's forecast for agriculture showed more detailed information on sources of supply. A little more groundwater use and less surface water use is the current trend.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords asked about swine production in the agricultural forecast and if that was fixed.

Response: There is an animal water use requirement based on full hog farming operation vs. suckling pigs, which might not require as much water. The agricultural forecast doesn't go into that level detail for a specific operation but the forecast that was developed is probably more on the conservative side.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords stated that the trend in our area is not towards city or centralized systems but more towards septic use.

Response: Dr. Booth's methodology may look at this in more detail in the next round. Data on septic tanks is still being gathered and something that EPD is looking into. A meeting attendee responded that one of the regional commissions is working on that and collecting data for the region which should be done in time for the next update in 5 years.

The PC then went on to provide a high level summary of the updates to Sections 3, 4 and 5 of the RWP and versions in both track changes and with changes accepted were provided to the Council.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords asked if we could add a leading paragraph in each of the sections. He would like to set the tone right at the top in the Summary box of each section so that it has a more positive message. This will help the Council in disseminating information and selling the plan.

Response: The PC stated that some items could be reordered in the summary box to better set the tone in the beginning.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords asked about water quality and assimilative capacity discussed on pages 6 and 7 in Section 3. What about natural flows and actual loading? That has changed since the original RWP.

Response: The PC stated that a figure was added in Section 3 that looked at not only permitted but actual (annual average) 2014 discharges – this analysis was done for the Altamaha River basin only.

The PC stated that the next step is to get final edits from Councils to finalize the draft RWP so that it can go out for Public Comment by March 31st. The Council should be thinking about if they would like to put together an editing subcommittee to review final plan edits.

Updated RWP - Section 3 Review

The PC then covered the highlights of edits that were made to Section 3 of the RWP. Hard copies were distributed to the CMs.

Question/Comment: A CM stated that with less forecasted demands compared to the previous round, the groundwater should be even more sustainable.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords asked Section 3.3 (Current Ecosystem Conditions) could be moved to the section that discussed water quality issues so that it is all together in one place?

Question/Comment: A CM stated there is little to no change in groundwater and little to no changes for surface water. We've identified MPs to address surface water gaps. From here forward, it looks like we will be focusing on water quality challenges. If you look at the rivers at current conditions, then when you get to permitted conditions it gets worse. Is the intent to tighten up the permits?

Response: EPD replied that when the Councils met in June or November at the joint meeting, Dr. Booth went through the water quality resource assessment. For the dissolved oxygen (DO) assimilative capacity assessment, she set the current permit at the full permitted limits. For projections, she looked at that more specifically and she actually made some assumptions for DO at permitted conditions under more stringent limits in the future.

Updated RWP - Section 4 Review

The PC then covered the highlights of edits that were made to Section 4 of the RWP. Hard copies were distributed to the CMs.

Question/Comment: A CM stated that on page 4-2, the prison population gets bigger every year. Another CM responded that the numbers for Wheeler County looked wrong as population is not increasing as they may close the prison.

Response: The PC replied that we don't look at the age structure and the racial composition for the population forecasts but focus on birth rate vs. death rates and in migration and out migration. The PC also reminded the Council that the population forecasts will be revisited and revised during the next 5-year cycle of the planning process.

Question/Comment: A CM stated that there were 4.9 M acres of cotton in 1917 and now 1.1M of cotton in 2016. Similarly for corn, there were 3.4 M acres in 1917, in 2016 it was 3/4 of a million acres. However our yield is up. We are getting more out of the land with less acreage.

Updated RWP - Section 5 Review

The PC then covered the highlights of edits that were made to Section 5 of the RWP. Hard copies were distributed to the CMs.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords requested more detail on Figure 5-1 - add which other Councils are part of the bars that are shown and to also define AAD-MGD.

Question/Comment: A CM asked why there is no municipal permitted groundwater in Wilcox County. Doesn't the City of Rochelle have a groundwater permit?

Response: The PC will look into this to confirm.

Question/Comment: A CM stated asked that in Table 5-3 which shows gaps, total gap days, and percentage of time, is there an appropriate way to rank these? Which one deserves a priority?

Response: The PC stated that it's possible, however we would urge caution as the relationship between the gap and resource varies from node to node – the resources are different as well as the species that inhabit those systems.

3) Report out on January 2017 Shared Resources Sub-Committee Meetings

The PC provided an overview of the Groundwater Shared Resource Subcommittee Meeting. The PC reached out across Council boundaries to invite attendees which included both Council members and groundwater users from the Savannah - Upper Ogeechee, Altamaha, and Coastal Georgia regions. The intent was for the Council members to interact with the largest permit holders. An overview of the Red and Yellow Zones and saltwater intrusion was provided. There is currently a moratorium on groundwater withdrawals in these zones which was established in 2011. Permit holders originally thought they could hold the line but what unfolded was permit reductions for users in the Red/Yellow Zones. Large entities with more resources are able to plan and meet these requirements. The smaller users, with less resources, will need more collaboration and optimization of the resource.

Question/Comment: A CM stated that if you are located in the Yellow Zone and want to drill a well in the green zone, this wouldn't be allowed to happen because it might stop the green zone county from being able to grow in the future.

Response: The PC noted that this type of situation varies by county - for instance, Bulloch County may be open to sharing but others may not.

Question/Comment: A CM stated there is a lot of growth going on at the coast. By the year 2020, reductions in groundwater will need to occur.

Response: The PC stated that this is the reason we do regional planning. There is some capacity of groundwater (green zone) but it is limited and has to be carefully managed. It is a hard line to

draw to move people to water. The other perspective is that collaboration can result in moving water to people if you embrace regional planning.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords stated that they should focus on managing their resources. The dynamics of politics can change on every election cycle. They are issues in Coastal Georgia and we need to be conscious and be good stewards of the resource.

The PC then provided an overview of the Surface Water Shared Resources Subcommittee meeting. Similar to the groundwater meeting, it was a mix of Council members and agricultural water users. The Altamaha region was represented by Rex Bullock and also Tim Smith and Furman Peebles. We reviewed demands and potential gaps at several nodes in finer detail. Chris Ward from EPD also reviewed the agricultural permitting program and discussed how the metering program recently moved into EPD's jurisdiction.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords asked if the sub-committee discussed what the solution would be.

Response: The PC stated that it starts with education and improved forecasts - then you move from education to understanding the results and then you get into solutions. It takes a while to get people to accept the results.

Question/Comment: A CM stated that the regulations eat into our profits - this is our land, this is our water. Our margins have always been thin. The only way we make a profit is by volume.

Response: The PC stated from another perspective, agricultural water use wasn't always measured. Now that it's measured, it can be managed.

Question/Comment: Chairman Jeffords stated that Claxton is the only gap in our Altamaha region. The technical information indicates that we have gaps and so the Council is charged to deal with it. There are some small gaps to address but our region is fortunate.

4) Review 2011 Decision Process

The PC reviewed the decision process that was used during the 2011 process. The Council agreed they would stay with the same consensus based approach.

5) Review and Discuss Management Practices

The PC gave an overview of the MPs and how they fit into addressing gaps and making sure the region meets their vision and goals. The PC noted the Tiers of Conservation, the Georgia Water Stewardship Act as well as some of the new drought management rules that were put in place in 2015.

The PC stated that for the purposes of review, the MPs were grouped into the following categories:

- Water Conservation
- Water Supply
- Wastewater and Water Quality
- Information Needs

Each individual MP was reviewed with the Council which focused on the grouping of surface water quantity and surface water quality MPs. Preliminary screening was performed by the PC and each MP was assigned one of the following categories:

- No Revision Needed (NRN)
- Additional Discussion Required (ADR)
- Revise or Eliminate (ROE)

The Council then gave their feedback on each MP and whether or not the assigned category was appropriate. The table below summarizes the changes to the MPs discussed by Council

Management Practice	Management Practice Description	Council Recommended Action for Plan Update / Comment
DCAR-7	Study Potential Use of Aquifers to Address Gaps	Remove
ASWS-1	Consider Low Flow Conditions in Future Surface Water Permitting	Make low priority
ASWS-2	Incentives for Dry-Year Releases from Ponds	Make low priority
ASWS-3	Incentives for Sustainable Groundwater Development	Make high priority
ASWS-6	Land Management Incentives	Make high priority
ASWS-7	Incentives for Greater Wastewater Returns	Make high priority
ASWS-8	Address Gaps Periods with Aquifer Storage	Remove
ASWS-9	Study Multi-Region Reservoir Feasibility	Remove
ASWS-10	Inter-Basin Transfers	Remove

Management Practice	Management Practice Description	Council Recommended Action for Plan Update / Comment
EDU-5	Clean-Up Events	Wayne County and City of Eastman are currently conducting these types of events
NUT-1	Link Nutrient Loading With Current Land Use	Broaden this MP to include all watersheds within the Altamaha Region, just not the Satilla Watershed

Question/Comment: A CM stated that all MPs related to aquifer storage and recovery should be removed. MPs that provide incentives should receive a higher priority. Any MPs related to inter-basin transfer should also be removed

Question/Comment: A CM stated their community recently moved their discharge to a new stream and they also had to add step aeration, so MP PSDO-2 should be kept.

6) Next steps and Schedule for Remaining RWP updates

The next steps for reviewing final edits with the Council was discussed and it was decided that the Council would meet (via teleconference) on Thursday, March 16th at 2:00 PM.

7) Public Comments/Local Elected Official Comments

There were no elected officials present and no public comments were given.

Meeting Adjourned at 2:55 PM

8) Meeting Attendance

Altamaha Regional Water Council members in attendance:

- Guy Rex Bullock, Cleve Edenfield, Ed Jeffords, Buddy Pittman, John Roller, and Paul Stavriotis

Georgia EPD Representatives in attendance:

- Jennifer Welte

Regional Water Council contractors in attendance:

- Danielle Honour, Rick Brown and Shayne Wood (CDM Smith)

Public/Agency attendees:

- Furman Peebles (Public)

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- Tim Smith (representing UGA Extension)
- Don Harrison (representing Georgia DNR Wildlife Resources Division, Fisheries Management)
- Cathy Black (representing GA Forestry Commission)
- Byron Feimster (representing Georgia Power)
- Lauren Goble (representing Georgia Farm Bureau)
- James Pope (representing Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission)