

## Memorandum

*To: Altamaha Regional Water Planning Council*

*From: Danielle Honour and Jenny Bywater, CDM Smith*

*Date: May 18, 2018*

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

This memorandum provides the meeting summary of the Altamaha Regional Water Planning Council Meeting, held on May 10, 2018 in Jesup, GA. This memorandum provides a summary of the major items discussed at the Council Meeting. The meeting began at 10:00 AM and followed the agenda outlined below.

### **1) Welcome and Discussion of the Altamaha River**

Council Members convened at Jaycee Landing near the Altamaha River for the morning portion of the Council Meeting. Council Chairman Ed Jeffords opened the meeting, welcomed Council Members and guests and turned the floor over to Lindsay Thomas for a discussion of the Altamaha River. Mr. Thomas notes the following during his discussion of the Altamaha River.

- The Altamaha River is undammed and the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest river on the Eastern Seaboard. It is also exclusively in Georgia and drains a quarter of the state.
- The conservation efforts to preserve the watershed have been one of the most significant efforts in the United States. Due to these conservation efforts, the floodplain along the river is still entirely intact. The Altamaha River was named one of the 75 last great places on Earth by the Nature Conservancy.
- Jaycee Landing is one of the very few places along the river that recreational users can access. The long-term strategic plan is to develop a multi-use facility which includes a nature center and a history center. The hope would be to promote public education as well as eco-tourism in the area.

Mr. Thomas then also introduced the Altamaha River Keeper, Jen Hilburn who also noted the uniqueness of the river. While she's traveled to many different places throughout the world, she was drawn to this area and works in her role as riverkeeper to help protect the river and the watershed.

Clay Bethea, the plant manager for Rayonier, welcomed the Council Members and noted that the plant has been in Jesup for approximately 60 years. The focus of their operation is the production of fiber materials that are manufactured from timber.

Following the discussion, Council Members participated in a short boat tour of the Altamaha River from the Jaycee Landing down past the Doctortown railroad trestle and back.

## **2) Lunch and Presentations from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources**

During lunch, Jason Lee from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Wildlife Resources Division gave a presentation on local nongame conservation efforts. Nongame is any wildlife that is not hunted or fished. Efforts focus on species protected under the Endangered Species Act as well as anticipating potential wildlife threats and working to acquire or manage habitat to mitigate those effects. Georgia has high wildlife diversity and ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation in the number of vertebrates, vascular plants and selected invertebrates. There are more than 100 rare plants and animals and over 50 different types of natural communities within the Altamaha River Basin. Mr. Lee provided a general overview of some of the major habit types and common species in each.

Mr. Lee then provided a more detailed look at the Gopher Tortoise Conservation Initiative. The gopher tortoise is a state protected species and a candidate for federal protection under the Endangered Species Act. The young tortoises feed on very low vegetation and require a habitat with new, short vegetation. With less fires, there was less successful reproduction and the population is aging. A gopher tortoise survey was conducted to find large population groups and then implement conservation efforts around those established populations. The goal is 65 protected populations and there are currently 47 in place. The aim of the initiative is to keep the gopher tortoises off of the Endangered Species list. Mr. Lee ended with a timeline of the protection and conservation efforts along the lower Altamaha river corridor.

Robert Horan, a game biologist with the DNR Wildlife Resources Division, then discussed game management. Hunters and fishers spend more the \$3.2 billion per year in Georgia. The Division is comprised of 3 sections: game management, fisheries management and nongame conservation. Wildlife conservation is paid primarily by hunters and anglers that purchase licenses and equipment. There is a total of 104 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) in Georgia covering over a million acres of land. The Altamaha River Corridor has four WMAs in the north and five in the south. There is also the Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area on Butler, Champney, and Rhett's islands. There is significant overlap between game management and nongame conservation in these areas. Prescribed fire is one of the most prominent tools for management of the wildlife areas.

## **3) Council Business**

Chairman Jeffords presented the meeting minutes from the last Council meeting held in January 2018 and called for a motion which was given, followed by a second, and vote passed approving the previous minutes. Chairman Jeffords then turned over the meeting to CDM Smith, the Planning Contractor (PC), who outlined the abbreviated Meeting Agenda and asked for approval. Chairman Jeffords called for a motion which was given, followed by a second and vote passed approving the agenda.

The PC thanked Miki Thomaston from Rayonier for her coordination to help plan the days' activities and opened the floor to general thoughts about the morning's tour. Chairman Jeffords thought it was important for Council Members to be able to see parts of the watershed, learn

about some of the history as well as ongoing conservation efforts. Chairman Jeffords said this meeting also gave our Council the ability to do some public outreach through a presentation that Chairman Jeffords gave to the Wayne Leadership group about the Council and their Regional Water Plan earlier in the day.

Randal Morris, a member of the Coastal Georgia Regional Water Planning Council, was also in attendance. Chairman Jeffords introduced him and welcomed him. Mr. Morris thanked the Council for their invitation and extended the invitation for members of the Altamaha Council to attend one of the Coastal Council's meetings in the future. He shared some of his council's activities and emphasized the shared nature of water resources between the councils.

Brian Mooney from Rayonier then provided a brief overview of the plant with a focus on some of the challenges related to their discharge to the Altamaha River. The Jesup mill was started in 1952 and the facility is not a traditional pulp and paper mill; the mill focuses on specialty pulps used in a variety of products from tires to LCD screens, to food and pharmaceuticals. Reducing color in the mill's waste streams has been a focus for the company. Rayonier has spent \$73 million since 2006 focusing on improving operations to manage color. While focused on these improvements, the mill has not increased their water usage. Miki Thomaston (Rayonier) passed around some examples of the products that are produced at the plant.

The Council then discussed potential topics for the next meeting. Some potential ideas/speakers that were identified at the last meeting include: 1) Dr. Gary Hawkins who recently was awarded the seed grant; 2) local County Extension agents (they also work with Dr. Hawkins); 3) Brett Manning with the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission; and 4) the PC liaison who works with adjacent neighboring councils. Chairman Jeffords also mentioned that new Council Member re-appointments are needed. The August/September timeframe was discussed for the next meeting. It was agreed that the PC will survey the CMs for dates during that time period. Chairman Jeffords mentioned focusing on the western side of the region (i.e., Wilcox County area) for the next potential meeting location. He stated that he would like to have Brett Manning also speak at a future meeting.

The PC also reminded the Council of identifying outreach opportunities in the region to share information about the plan. Chairman Jeffords said he would like to pursue outreach opportunities with the Future Farmers of America (FFA) and would like to talk to the PC more about this after the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:22pm.

#### **4) Meeting Attendance**

Altamaha Regional Water Planning Council Members in attendance:

- Ed Jeffords, Rex Bullock, Mark Burns, Gerald DeWitt, John Roller, Paul Stavriotis, Lindsey Thomas

Georgia EPD Representatives in attendance:

- Jennifer Welte, Christine Vouidy

Regional Water Planning Council planning contractors in attendance:

- Danielle Honour and Jenny Bywater (CDM Smith)

Public/Agency attendees:

- Brian Mooney, Rayonier Advanced Materials
- Miki Thomaston, Rayonier Advanced Materials
- Randal Morris, Coastal Georgia Regional Water Planning Council
- Byron Feimster, Georgia Power
- Furman Peebles, Public
- Leigh Elkins, Carl Vinson Institute
- Josh Hildebrandt, representing the Georgia Secretary of State
- Robert Horan, Georgia DNR
- Jason Lee, Georgia DNR
- Jen Hilburn, Altamaha Riverkeeper