

Memorandum

To: Georgia Regional Water Planning Councils – Coastal Georgia

From: Shayne Wood, CDM Smith

Date: November 19, 2024

Subject: Regional Water Planning Outreach Meeting (Savannah Area Sub-Region) Summary

This memorandum provides a summary of the items presented during the November 19, 2024, Coastal Georgia Regional Water Planning Council and Outreach Meeting, held at the Georgia Institute of Technology's campus in Savannah, GA. This meeting also included participation virtually via the MS Teams platform. This memorandum provides a summary of the major items discussed at the Council Meeting. The meeting was held from 12:00 PM to 3:30 PM and followed the agenda outlined below.

Welcome and Introductions

CDM Smith, the Planning Contractor (PC), and Benjy Thompson the Council Chairman, initiated the meeting, welcoming Council Members (CM) and guests, and asked each Council Member (CM) and attendee to introduce themselves. Mr. Wood (PC) explained that the first part of the meeting would be an outreach meeting, and the second half of the meeting would be a full council meeting. Mr. Wood reviewed the agenda for the outreach meeting and introduced the guest speakers.

1) Outreach Meeting Content for Savannah Area (Shayne Wood, CDM Smith)

Mr. Wood explained the primary drivers for regional water planning include rapid population growth the need to find a balance between increasing and sometimes conflicting demands. Regional planning allows the community to address water challenges in a more comprehensive and proactive manner.

Mr. Wood reviewed water planning efforts statewide and the different Georgia planning regions. He noted that county boundaries define the regions, but the surface water basins are also used to generally help defining the boundaries for the planning regions. In Coastal Georgia, there are 9 counties that make up the planning region. Mr. Wood reviewed the planning process and the circular, continuous update of the process and how the vision and goals play a central role in planning.

Mr. Wood added that the regional water plan is updated every five years, and it includes vision and goals, current and future water supply, wastewater needs, resource assessments, management practices, and recommendations to the state.

Mr. Wood shared the Coastal Georgia Vision, which was adopted in 2009. He also reviewed the forecast of water demands, the Coastal Georgia groundwater availability assessment, the Coastal Georgia management practices, including a summary of passive and active conservation strategies. Mr. Wood also outline the regional water plan's recommendations to the state, and highlighted how the council has been working to support plan implementation. The next review and revision of the plan will be in 2027 through 2028. Mr. Wood explained that meetings for the Council are open to the public and are open for public comment. All comments are documented, reviewed, and addressed with the Council. Mr. Wood noted where attendees could locate the regional water plan, at waterplanning.georgia.gov.

2) Seed Grant Updates and Discussion on New Seed Grant Projects (Shayne Wood, CDM Smith)

Mr. Wood explained that two seed grants were submitted in October 2024: 1) Georgia Southern – Assessing Water Efficiency Potential in Coastal GA and 2) University of GA – Integrated Forecasting and Mitigation Strategies for Water Demand and Flood Resilience in Coastal GA.

The seed grant cycle typically opens in August and closes in October annually. Mr. Wood added that councils generally like to hold a meeting once a quarter, and if there is anyone interested in seed grants, they should share the idea with the Council at the first or second quarterly meeting. Grants are limited to \$75,000 and applicants must be a government entity or partner with a government entity.

Mr. Wood concluded the outreach portion of the meeting and introduced GA EPD for their presentation.

3) Updates from EPD on Recent Regional Groundwater Modeling Capability Developed (Dr. Wei Zeng and Dr. Julian Spergel, GA EPD)

Dr. Zeng introduced the presentation agenda and emphasized that GA EPD understands that water does not follow political boundaries. He explained that the presentation will discuss the work associated with saltwater intrusion issues, specifically on Hilton Head Island, and how this may affect the Savannah area. Dr. Zeng noted that GA EPD plans to implement the existing coastal permitting policy in January 2025 for a 5 million gallons per day (MGD) permit limit reductions that will go into effect in the red zone and yellow zone. Mr. Zeng noted that discussions for the next phase of permitting, that will need to occur in 2027, will begin with stakeholders in January 2025.

Dr. Spergel introduced the modeling effort for the presentation. He explained the model is built in the DYNFLOW model, and the physics of the model are explained by each node that communicate with each other. This model was used to build the CSSI model (Coastal Sound Science Initiative), and the study focuses on the surficial aquifer and the upper Floridan aquifer. He reviewed the baseline (scenario 2), which is modeled over 365 days and modeled with 2016 average pumping rates. Less than 0.1 ft of drawdown was used as the threshold for concerns. Dr. Zeng emphasized that each point shown on the map is at least one model run, and it is an

iterative process. An attendee asked if the model could be updated with more recent pumping data.

A CM asked in a broad sense, what is happening to the saltwater plume in Hilton Head? Is this still moving in the southwest direction and has the rate changed? Dr. Zeng responded that this is a question on the status of the plume, not the modeling work, which shows how withdrawing water from one location affects Hilton Head Island. He added that the potential for the model to be utilized in the planning is that the model tells us the closer you are to the center of the cone of depression or Hilton head island, the less you can withdraw.

Another CM added that at the Liberty County meeting, he thought the presentation discussed that the plume was not moving to Savannah. Ms. Christine Voudy, EPD, clarified that her presentation discussed that the cone of depression was reduced by 40 ft (recovery), which changes the gradient and slows the rate of groundwater encroachment for Georgia. This means the saltwater plume could still be moving to Savannah, but the rate in which it is moving has slowed. GA EPD explained it will take longer than 125 years for saltwater to make its way to Savannah.

A public attendee asked what the net benefit would be if International Paper switched from a groundwater source to a surface water source. Dr. Zeng explained that if there is a way to lessen the groundwater withdrawal impact close to the cone of depression, the same amount of water (or potentially more) can be withdrawn away from the center of the cone of depression with the same level of impact on Hilton Head Island. For example, if International Paper reduces groundwater withdrawals by 2 MGD, then 2 MGD (or more) of pumping can be applied outside the cone.

Outreach Meeting Public Comment/Local Elected Official Comments

Mr. Wood asked if anyone online or in person would like to make a public comment, including local elected officials. No public or local elected official comments were received.

4) Council Meeting

Council Members reviewed the draft meeting minutes from the September 8th, 2023 Council Meeting. Chairman Thompson called for a Motion, which was seconded, and a vote from other council members in attendance to approve the previous meeting summary. Chairman Thompson then asked Council Members to review the agenda. A motion was made to approve the agenda, followed by a second and a vote passed to approve the agenda.

Mr. Wood introduced Katherine Zitsch will be taking over as the new Regional Water Planning Council Planning Contractor. Mrs. Zitsch is with the Georgia Water Planning & Policy Center and Mr. Wood noted that Mrs. Zitsch helped draft the original Coastal Georgia regional water plan. Mr. Wood explained there will be a hand off from CDM Smith to Katherine Zitsch and the Georgia Water Planning & Policy Center. Mr. Reid Jackson also added that he will be handing off the GA EPD liaison role to Johmar Haye. Both Mr. Wood and Mr. Jackson can still be reached as needed.

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Ms. Zitsch explained that she was previously involved with the groundwater models that EPD is now using, she was the Director of the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District, and is currently also supporting the Savannah Upper Ogeechee's regional water planning council. She is excited to be involved and is very reachable.

Mr. Wood summarized that the purpose of the council meeting today is to map out the council meetings for the next two years.

- A CM noted that the outreach meetings have been a good opportunity to communicate the planning process and results with the public. He suggested they try to advertise these in a different way to communicate with a larger audience. Chairman Thompson agreed and noted that the Council will make an effort to invite the correct people in the future.
- Mr. Mark Smith suggested that it might be time for the red zone and yellow zone stakeholders to start meeting again, more often, maybe a few times over the next couple of years rather than only once or twice every 5 years.
- A CM noted that at the Bulloch County outreach meeting, it felt like the Council could have prepared differently. Chairman Thompson agreed and noted the Council can take away lessons learned from this meeting. The best thing moving forward is to get everyone together and communicate what is going on as far in advance as possible. A lot of economic development information is confidential, so this can be challenging sometimes.
 - A CM asked if the Council or GA EPD could make a proactive statement that says water levels are improving. GA EPD explained that many people do not understand how the withdrawals from an industry (e.g., The Mega Site) relate to the actual reductions in the rise in the cone of depression. A statement needs to be more focused on ground roots education, rather than how we have had recovery.
- Mr. Wood suggested that the next time the industrial forecast is done, the Council could look at different growth scenarios with the state economic department to address in the regional water plan.
- Mr. Smith asked if the City of Savannah will be reducing pumping, and the City confirmed they will be reducing withdrawals by 3 MGD in total.

A CM asked who is keeping up with appointment statuses for new CMs. Mr. Wood explained that GA EPD maintains the official roster. EPD added that they are working on getting an updated list for all 10 councils (3-year appointments for staggered terms). Mr. Odom noted that his appointment was for 5 years, and EPD said they will look into this. EPD confirmed that until a CM is officially told they are not on the Council, EPD is operating as if the CM is still appointed.

The CMs agreed they would like to target 2-3 meetings per year as long as there is a purpose. Chairman Thompson suggested the Council meet during the first quarter of 2025.

- A CM noted that in the future, the Council should look at updating the plan with the Hyundai withdrawal information. Chairman Thompson agreed and asked if GA EPD has ever done revisions to the 5-year plans.

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- Dr. Zeng explained that the Metro District has done an amendment of plans in the middle of the planning cycle when a facility came to GA EPD asking for increased withdrawal capacity. The Council could work with EPD to make sure amendment language is appropriate.
- Ms. Zitsch added that amendments at the Metro Water District were often the most discussed items, as they are standalone outside of the plan update.
- Mr. Wood noted that census data for 2020 is now available, and this could be used to evaluate if there's been a change in growth.
- Mr. Odom suggested the Council can pull projection and growth data out and compare it to the governor's office.

GA EPD introduced Russel Nix, who has been with EPD for 19 years and will be supporting all 10 councils. There will be two more specialists hired to help Mr. Nix get updates, nominations, and projections.

5) Council Meeting Public Comment/Local Elected Official Comments

Mr. Wood asked if anyone online or in person would like to make a public comment, including local elected officials. No public or local elected official comments were received.

Chairman Thompson asked the Council to think about changes to the coastal region and what it would be if we did not have this group. Chairman Thompson thanked GA EPD, the Council, and CDM Smith.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 pm.

6) Council Meeting Attendance

Affiliation	Name
<i>Coastal Georgia Regional Water Planning Council</i>	Russ Foulke Bill Guthrie Brent Howell Brian Nease Phil Odom Pete Peterson Mark Smith David Stevens Benjy Thompson Jim Vaughn Randy Weitman
<i>Regional Water Planning Council Planning Contractors</i>	Emory Gawlik Shayne Wood Katherine Zitsch
<i>Georgia EPD</i>	Clete Barton Bill Frechette Johmar Haye Reid Jackson Russell Nix

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Affiliation	Name
	Julian Spergel Ania Truszczynski Christine Voudy Jennifer Welte Dr. Wei Zeng
<i>Effingham County</i>	Tim Callanan Tre Wilkins
<i>City of Savannah</i>	Bryan Shaw Ron Feldner Shawn Rosenquist
<i>Thomas and Hutton</i>	Matthew Frazier
<i>Georgia Southern</i>	Asli Aslan
<i>Georgia Conservancy</i>	Courtney Reich
<i>Public Attendees</i>	Christina Webster Ed Saxon