



Meeting Summary

Lower Flint Ochlockonee Regional Water Council
Jones Center at Ichauway
Newton, GA
April 7, 2026

Welcome

Mark Masters (GWPPC) welcomed everyone and thanked participants for attending. He then reviewed the agenda and objectives for the day's meeting. He shared links to the recent water planning webinar series and updated the council on the promotional videos being produced for each council.

Chair's Report

Chairman Campbell welcomed and thanked the Council members for attending. He called attention to the lack of rain in the region, and potential challenges ahead if it continues to be dry. The chairman also noted the importance for considering data centers from a water perspective for the region, as the region has been under a moratorium on water withdrawals for a long time.

EPD Updates

Tim Fields (GAEPD) presented updates from the 2026 Seed Grant Application period, which ended on October 31, 2025. One seed grant was awarded in the region to the City of Thomasville: "Stormwater Education Phase II- Commercial."

Tim also provided an update on progress of the changes to the State Water Plan, with major changes in Section 14 for council numbers, composition, and term length. It is currently with the Governor awaiting signature.

Question: Council member asked a question on if the council numbers for their council will be reduced and if they have any input on the new appointment process for the council.

Response: Veronica Craw (GAEPD) answered and explained that EPD is currently developing the process for the council appointment, but it is not in place yet because

they since they are still waiting on the Governor's signature. They are interested in hearing from the Council Chairs for input.

Agricultural Water Permitting Updates

Edward Rooks (GAEPD) gave an update on the Agricultural Water Withdrawal Program. The program has three units: metering, compliance, and permitting. Groundwater Frost/Freeze protection applications for the 2012 Flint River Basin Suspension Area are being accepted, applications in the green zone opened in 2023 and applications for the orange and red zones in 2024. Applications for Surface Water Withdrawal opened in 2024 in portions of the Suwannee and Ochlockonee River Basins within the 2012 Suspension Area. The 2012 suspension remains in place for Surface Water Withdrawals in the Flint River. Edward reviewed the types of groundwater permit types currently available – unrestricted permit, drought restricted permit, and volumetric limited permit.

Edward reviewed new and existing compliance options for permits currently out of compliance. See meeting slides for specific details on compliance pathways. Edward then reviewed the metering program. The objective is to obtain accurate meter readings from agricultural water withdrawals and utilize these readings to improve the understanding of agricultural water use throughout Georgia. He reviewed partnerships for meter reading and that the state is responsible for meter maintenance once it has been installed and approved.

Edward finished with an update on GA-FIT Drought SWAP. The project end date is October 31, 2026.

Discussion Summary:

Question: Is the end of the Drought SWAP October 21, 2026?

Response: Everything in terms of infrastructure installation must be done by then, but the program itself will continue.

Question: in terms of violations, are you seeing wells that went in improperly or wells added improperly? How do you find that?

Response: Both. Maps are constantly being made, and new images are used to compare over time

Question: Is it unfair to say for a farmer that is interested in a new permit from the Floridan that the red and yellow zones are no longer part of the equation since everything in the Floridan is interruptible?

Response: EPD – Anything in there is fair game

Question: If a farmer owns land with a permitted well and wants to add a well to ease the pressure on one well, what happens to the acreage once he adds the new well? Does he lose those acres?

Response: there's a policy paper on EPD's website and a compliance toolbox; short answers is no but it would require adding a new permit with the relevant restrictions

Comment: local farmers have appreciated EPD's willingness to listen to people

Implementation Assessment

Caitlin Sweeney provided a progress update on the implementation assessment for the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Region. At the end of the presentation Chairman Campbell called for council volunteers to review the assessments. The reports will be finalized by June 2026.

Volunteers: Murray Campbell, Mike Newberry, and Cory Thomas

Data Centers Discussion

Data centers have been a topic of interest across councils and members had an open discussion that covered the following topics:

- Water use by data centers and discussion of closed loop cooling. There was interest in more information on wastewater quality from data centers
- Early County Data center
- Data center energy needs, considerations for what that could mean for Georgia systems.
- Council approved a motion to develop a statement for data center DRI's in the region
 - Mike Newberry as contact

Updates from Flint Riverkeeper

Council member, David Dixon from Flint Riverkeeper, gave an update from the Riverkeeper. David covered the following topics:

- The Flint Riverkeeper is hiring 2 positions
- They are aware and monitoring multiple data centers possibly in production – they encourage getting involved
- Updated on the Atlanta Airport fuel spill
 - Flint Riverkeeper is taking legal action against the Atlanta airport after 28,000 gallons of fuel spilled and 3 municipal systems shut down in the upper watershed. It did not show up in samples in the lower Flint.

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- Flint Riverkeeper is monitoring the soil erosion bill
- Albany combined sewer overflow project
 - Albany met their 85% disconnect permit requirements in November and plans are in place for the next 15% and the city is waiting on their new permit
 - EPD shared that they are working on CSO permits for Atlanta, Columbus, and Albany (likely released in that order) – the drafts will be made available for public comment, hopefully by fall.
- Changes to State Water Plan (reduction in council membership)
 - Opposed to reductions, with concerns about the number of political appointments and fewer people working with the environment
 - There were conversation and response during this update – council members expressed that the new term limits are long, particularly for older council members
 - EPD provided a response and clarification to the changes to the councils
 - They appreciate the perspective of the Riverkeeper; requirements make up 50% of council so there are opportunities for NGOs. They wanted representation from sectors that are directly impacted by regional water planning.
 - There are councils in the state that have struggled with participation and meeting quorum – so fewer appointment could help address this
 - The 6-year timeline tries to get councils through the plan review and revision process

Priorities Discussion

Laura Rack (GWPPC) led the council and observers in a 2-part priorities discussion to prepare for the upcoming review and revision of the regional water plan.

Council members discussed three questions during the first part of the exercise:

- Over the past 10–15 years, what are the most important changes you’ve observed in the management of water supply and water quality in this region?
- When you think about the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee region 20 years from now, what does “success” look like for our water resources?
- What water-related issues will have the greatest influence on the region’s ability to grow and thrive over the next five to ten years?

In response to changes over the last 15 years, council members expressed the change in technology and data available for planning and decision making, including data on water uses

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and instream flow. They also noted the progress in agricultural permitting and increased consideration for environmental concerns. The GA-FIT program and habitat conservation plan in the Lower Flint were examples of this progress.

Council members expressed that protecting the whole system and people who use and benefit from the water resources will be important in the future (agriculture, animals, environment, drinking water, etc.). In addition, population growth and development may have the greatest influences on water resources.

During the second part of the priorities discussion council members discussed what they wanted to see more of or done differently in water planning. The council region has made significant progress in addressing water related issues in the agricultural sector. Council members emphasized the importance of maintaining that progress but noted it may be important to shift focus to other sectors in the region. The needs may include funding to address aging infrastructure to support water security and economic growth, technology for managing human waste (e.g., septic and wastewater treatment), stormwater and water quality, improving education on stewardship of water resources (learning from successes in agriculture), and more information on PFAS in South Georgia.

An additional discussion on well permitting raised a potential information gap for sealed wells since it relies on permittees notifying EPD if a well is capped and sealed.

Public Comment

Brian, GEFA rep: GEFA has recently regionalized and LFO has a GEFA rep. GEFA has grant opportunities coming up and he'll send it out

Next Steps

Mark Masters (GWPPC) noted that the team will follow up with information from the meeting and the meeting summary. He also let council members know that GWPPC and the councils are standing by for the appointment process pending a signature from the Governor.

Adjourn

Chairman Campbell thanked those who attended today's meeting.

Council Members Attending April 7, 2026 Meeting

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Murray Campbell

Mark DeMott

David Dixon*

Steve Bailey

Chris Addleton

Mark Spooner

Cory Thomas

Mike Newberry

Don Porter (Nominee)

Other Attendees

Kristin Rowles (GWPPC)*

Mark Masters (GWPPC)

Caitlin Sweeney (GWPPC)

Laura Rack (GWPPC)

Tim Fields (GAEPD)

Parris Maguire (GAEPD)

Veronica Craw (GAEPD)

Edward Rooks (GAEPD)

Ethan King (GAEPD)

Brian Woodham (GEFA)

Steve Golladay (Jones Center)

Georgeanna Randall (Jones Center)

Seth McAllister (UGA Extension – Terrell Co.)

Cassenda Nelson (I&A Divyne Purpose Inc)

**By videoconference*