

Memorandum

To: Middle Ocmulgee Regional Water Planning Council

From: Laura Hartt and Michelle Vincent, Jacobs

Date: December 10, 2018

Subject: Middle Ocmulgee Council Meeting Summary

This memorandum provides the meeting summary of the Middle Ocmulgee (MOC) Regional Water Planning Council Meeting, held on November 2, 2018 at Middle Georgia Regional Commission in Macon, Georgia. This memorandum provides a summary of the items discussed at the Council Meeting that was held from approximately 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

1. Welcome, Introductions, and Overview

Pending arrival of the Chair, Planning Contractor (PC) called the meeting to order, noting the agenda was updated to reflect the addition of Danny Johnson (Metro North Georgia Water Planning District) to the agenda.

Upon Chairman Richardson's arrival, the November 13, 2017 Council Meeting minutes and the November 2, 2018 Council Meeting draft agenda both were approved by motion, second, and then unanimous vote.

2. Alternative Flow Regimes Pilot Study

Gail Cowie (EPD) gave an overview of the methodology and rationale behind the surface water resource assessments. She explained that for surface waters, thresholds chosen for rivers/streams come from the state's interim instream flow policy which relies on the monthly 7Q10 statistic. Ms. Cowie also explained that this metric was chosen because the state's interim instream flow policy relies upon it and because it's generally considered protective of water quality and aquatic life during low flow conditions. Ms. Cowie then acknowledged the Council's concern that monthly 7Q10 is not necessarily protective of all instream uses, potentially including recreation, fishing, habitat, and aesthetics. The Council's concern was captured within the MOC Regional Water Plan recommendations to EPD, namely that the agency consider evaluating an alternative to the minimum instream flow policy that relies on site-specific values supportive of local instream uses.

Next, Dr. Wei Zeng (EPD) provided the Council with an update of the pilot study stemming from the Council's recommendation. He noted that EPD convened a meeting in May to solicit stakeholder input regarding services and values for the region's water bodies. During the stakeholder meeting, river users identified several services and values of local and regional interest, including recreation, water supply, water quality, wildlife management, and hydroelectric. EPD reviewed several data sets available, including historical flows, climate data,

river morphology (below Lake Jackson), wetland availability, fish habitat/river substrate, land use, and Georgia Power hydroelectric operations. EPD contracted with Arcadis to develop four models: Lake Jackson reservoir operations (ResSim); river surface elevation and velocity (RAS); habitat availability (SEFA); and wetted perimeter and inundation (EFM).

Council Member asked why the models begin 30 miles below Lake Jackson. Dr. Zeng responded that EPD was limited by data availability but that future models might be able to evaluate flow conditions above Lake Jackson as well as the 30 miles immediately below the dam.

Dr. Zeng indicated that the modeling results would be presented to the stakeholder group on November 13 and would include recreational accessibility, floodplain inundation timing and location, wetted perimeter as an indicator of aquatic habitat, and substrate type as another indicator of aquatic habitat. Future work will include looking at alternative hydrological scenarios to evaluate their potential impacts on these services and values.

Council Member asked if EPD would apply this methodology outside the Ocmulgee region. Dr. Zeng responded that if the pilot study was successful, other Council may want to adopt a similar approach during future planning activities.

Council Member asked if the substrate models could be used to look at sediment oxygen demand to monitor wastewater discharges and to set loads. Dr. Zeng indicated he would discuss the possibility with Dr. Liz Booth at EPD.

Council Member asked how Georgia Power manages releases from Lake Jackson. Dr. Zeng indicated that GP operates on a weekly basis in a run of river mode, so there is not a lot of lake level fluctuation. In general, releases may drop to 400 cfs or the inflow, whichever is lower, and rarely dip below 250 cfs. Multiple Council Members indicated they have seen levels well below 250 cfs. Dr. Zeng indicated that lower flows were not necessarily a violation and encouraged Council Members to participate in upcoming FERC relicensing discussions to learn more. Council Member asked whether water management or FERC relicensing takes precedence. Another Council Member indicated that the utility gets peak data on a daily basis because it impacts withdrawals for municipal water supply. This Council Member indicated there were data going back 10 years which could be shared with EPD and might yield more information than the weekly data.

One Council Member noted that early releases down the Towaliga River geared to offset potential flooding during hurricane season meant extremely low flows later in the season. Council Member questioned what impact the low flows would have on the environment and how long it would take the river to recover. Dr. Zeng indicated that there should be a low flow requirement in place protective of water quality. Several Council Members expressed concern regarding enforcement and monitoring. Dr. Zeng agreed to inquire with the agency to learn more and to follow up with the Council.

3. Council Outreach Efforts

PC provided the Council with an overview of outreach materials and opportunities. PC shared the fact sheet and noted they are on the website as well. PC then provided a brief introduction the outreach PowerPoint and offered to help customize the presentation for Council Member use depending on audiences. PC passed around a sign-up sheet and encouraged Council Members to volunteer for upcoming speaking engagements.

Council Member noted that only 7 of 26 Council Members were present and expressed concerns over how effective they can be with low participation. Another Council Member suggested that the areas poorly represented at the Meeting might be those areas most in need of outreach. Council Member suggested assigning members to approach different implementing actors, suggesting that Members are more likely to respond if given something specific to do. PC agreed to follow up with Members not in attendance.

EPD staff summarized their outreach efforts, including presentations at professional conferences (e.g., GAWP, GA Enviro Conference, GA Rural Association). The idea of organizing a regional water panel at the next ACCG meeting also was discussed.

One Council Member noted their utility's newsletter that goes out with the water bills and suggested featuring the recent instream flow study as part of the regional water planning effort in it.

PC introduced Council Members to the new regional water planning website, noting the new features. Council Members discussed possible content additions, including grant updates, FERC relicensing news, and National Park Service updates.

4. Metro North Georgia Water Planning District Basin Advisory Council

Danny Johnson (Metro North Georgia Water Planning District) provided the Council with a summary of the Basin Advisory Council role in the Metro District regional water planning process, noting that the next meeting for the Ocmulgee BAC was scheduled for November 15th at the Newnan Wetlands Center. PC encouraged Council Members to attend and consider applying for membership during the District's next membership drive (Summer 2019). Mr. Johnson distributed informational brochures.

5. Project Implementation Updates and Discussion

Kevin Clark, Executive Director of Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA), provided an overview of GEFA financing for water and energy projects. Mr. Clark then provided an overview of GEFA's Water Supply Program, which included \$68 million in state direct investment and financed construction of six reservoirs and four water supply wells, deep aquifer well research, and agricultural irrigation metering. Mr. Clark also described other state (e.g., Georgia Fund, Reservoir Fund) as well as the federal Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs.

Council Members inquired about the level of GEFA funding that has come to the region. Mr. Clark replied that GEFA has funded many projects throughout region over the past decade, amounting to roughly \$136M in financing.

6. Grant Projects

Council Member Marcie Seleb reviewed the history of GEFA fund awards for Butts County, including \$1M for a water main project (GA Fund Loan), \$2.1M for a water main and water pump project (Drinking Water SRF), \$3.6M for a wastewater facility project (Clean Water SRF), \$542K for an AMR system (Drinking Water SRF), and \$980K for a water storage tank (Drinking Water SRF). In some cases, Butts County acquired the GEFA funding then paid it back using SPLOST or operating funds.

Ms. Seleb also reviewed recent Seed Grants awarded to Butts County, including one to assess the source of bromide contamination in the County's drinking water and another one to install a trash rack on the South River. Council Members discussed at length the need for a public education and outreach campaign to confront the issue of litter in the region's streams. PC agreed to work with EPD and interested Council Members to explore the feasibility of a Seed Grant for outreach on the issue.

7. Wrap Up & Next Steps

PC and Council Members discussed possible date range and location for next meeting, potentially aiming for spring (May), to be able to discuss Flow Regime results. New conference center in Butts County will be looked at as possible meeting location. FERC relicensing process for Lake Jackson was also mentioned as a possible topic of interest for the next meeting.

8. Public Comments/Local Elected Official Comments

Chairman Richardson asked if there were any members of the public or elected officials present who wished to provide any comments. No comments were forthcoming. Meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:00 pm.

Meeting Attendance

Council

Peter Banks
Mike Bilderback
Don Cook
Tony Rojas
Marcie Seleb
Robert Ray

EPD

Veronica Craw
Gail Cowie
Hialian Liang
Jennifer Welte
Wei Zeng

Planning Contractor

Michelle Vincent (Jacobs)
Laura Hartt (Jacobs)

Public

Harold West (GA Forestry)
Paul McDaniel (GA Forestry)
Danny Johnson (Metro District)
Mark Wyzalek (Macon Water Authority)