

Memorandum

To: Middle Ocmulgee Regional Water Planning Council

From: Laura Hartt and Michelle Vincent, Jacobs

Date: September 12, 2019

Subject: Middle Ocmulgee Council Meeting Summary

This memorandum provides the meeting summary of the Middle Ocmulgee (MOC) Regional Water Planning Council Meeting, held on June 6, 2019 at the Idlewilde Lakeside Event Center, Indian Springs State Park (Flovilla, Georgia). This memorandum provides a summary of the items discussed at the Council Meeting that was held from approximately 10:00 AM to 2:30 PM.

1. Welcome, Introductions, and Overview

Council Chair called the meeting to order.

Katherine Darsey (Indian Springs State Park Manager) welcomed the Council and provided a brief overview of the new facility and history of Indian Springs State Park.

The November 2, 2018 Council Meeting minutes and the June 6, 2019 Council Meeting draft agenda both were approved by motion, second, and then unanimous vote.

2. Alternative Flow Regimes Pilot Study

Dr. Wei Zeng (EPD) provided an update on the Alternative Flow Regimes Pilot Study. EPD initiated the pilot study in response to the Council's recommendation, as outlined in the updated 2017 MOC Regional Water Plan, that EPD consider alternatives to the minimum instream flow policy, i.e. ones that rely on stream-specific values. In May 2018, EPD solicited stakeholder input regarding services and values for the region's water bodies to inform additional analyses of flow regimes other than those considered during the resource assessment process. 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 power generation. 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). The results were presented to the stakeholder group November 13, 2018, summarizing recreational accessibility, floodplain inundation timing and location, wetted perimeter as an indicator of aquatic habitat, and substrate type as another indicator of aquatic habitat. Dr. Zeng shared these results with the Council as well.

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Dr. Zeng summarized some of the potential impacts of future water use on services and values, e.g., determining that at and around the USGS Macon gage there would be a small reduction in recreational availability.

One council member asked if this result pertained only to the recreational season or was a year-round result. Dr. Zeng responded that it was a year-round result.

Another council member asked why EPD relied on data only through 2013. Dr. Zeng responded that they were limited by data availability. Using USGS gage data from more recent years would require further analysis.

Dr. Zeng also presented an aquatic area-weighted suitability metric used to evaluate changes in flow-related habitat availability for different fish guilds:

Bluehead chub, spottail shiner—shallow/fast

Largemouth bass—deep/fast

Blue gill, sunfish—shallow/slow

One council member suggested this approach might be helpful for anglers.

Dr. Zeng noted that the report is available online, on the MOC's water planning website:

https://waterplanning.georgia.gov/sites/waterplanning.georgia.gov/files/related_files/blog/Flow%20Regime.Meeting%20Summary%20Report%20with%20Presentations.pdf

Dr. Zeng then outlined the next steps for the study, which includes involving biologists to interpret the metrics to help inform future planning activities as well as collecting more data to assess river bathymetry and species-specific (as opposed to guild-focused) response to flow changes.

Council Chair noted that the results seem to suggest minimal impacts of future water use on river flows. Dr. Zeng indicated that current information suggests that is the case, but there may be other information forthcoming that could suggest otherwise. Council Chair noted that Metro's water use will have an impact on the Ocmulgee basin. Dr. Zeng agreed that upstream use will have impacts.

Another council member noted that increases in impervious surfaces will increase flows but also have impacts on water quality. Dr. Zeng stated that the current study did not take those future factors into account but that it was a good point. Council member requested that EPD take a look at those impacts; Dr. Zeng said that they would do so, as resources allow.

Council Chair noted that water quality in Lake Jackson has improved due to improved wastewater treatment. Another council member noted that run-off is still going to increase. Dr. Zeng indicated that EPD would examine the issue during the next water quality resource assessment. Ms. Welte noted that the University of Georgia is updating land use trends out to 2060, which may provide more insights.

3. FERC Relicensing Process for Lloyd Shoals Dam/Lake Jackson

Courtenay O'Mara (Southern Company) provided an overview of the FERC relicensing process as well as the history of Lloyd Shoals Dam/Lake Jackson. Ms. O'Mara noted that the relicensing process for Lloyd Shoals Dam was underway and that it was a good time for the Council to get involved.

One council member asked if there are minimum flow requirements for the turbines. Ms. Courtenay indicated that maintaining minimum flows are a requirement of the license and that the USGS gage 1-mile downstream of the compliance point records the flows.

Another council member asked if national politics are ever an issue. Ms. Courtenay responded that FERC stays on schedule, the board is bi-partisan, and the board generally defers to staff scientists. Ms. Courtenay did note that NMFS may request a study to address American eel passage.

Ms. Courtenay indicated that the FERC license expires December 2023, which means that the proposed license renewal needs to be submitted by December 2021. Therefore, the Council's best opportunity for providing input is by July 2020.

One council member asked what impacts will be evaluated downstream of Jackson and how far those impacts will be assessed. Ms. Courtenay indicated that water quality at the 1-mile gage is probably the extent.

Dr. Zeng indicated that Georgia Power and EPD have discussed using the EPD model to analyze the impacts of increased releases on lake levels.

Ms. Courtenay pointed council members to the Georgia Power (<http://georgiapowerlakes.com/lakejackson/>) and FERC (www.ferc.gov, Project # 2336-094) websites where project information and relicensing documents were located. She also provided the email address for submitting comments (G2jacksonREL@southernco.com).

One council member suggested the Council request a tour of the dam, noting that he had attended one and found it informative. Ms. Courtenay indicated that she could assist in arranging a tour. Planning Contractor will explore setting up a tour for the Council.

A member of the public who lives in Lake Jackson's flood zone asked what the protocol was for eliminating excessive flooding. Ms. Courtenay responded that the project is not really sized as a flood control project, so operational decisions are made based on inflows and lake levels. During high flood periods, Georgia Power opens the gates ahead of the peak period but the turbines themselves are not capable of quickly vacating the reservoir.

One council member noted that during the flood of 1994, engineers could not have modified the dam in any way to handle the amount of water Jackson received. Another council member asked what the lake level was at that time. EPD responded that it was 534 feet.

Dr. Zeng noted that the EPD model could examine the different operations to see how they impact river uses. Council was encouraged to provide Dr. Zeng with input prior to December 2019.

4. Lunch Keynote: Ocmulgee River Trail

Mary Brooks and Kit Carson with the Ocmulgee River Water Trail Partnership provided an overview of the water trail, which extends 252 miles from Lake Jackson to the confluence with Altamaha. This water trail is the longest, continuous water trail in Georgia, with 15 counties bordering.

Ms. Brooks outlined their organization's history, mission, accomplishments, and programming. Noting the need to add landings to shorten paddle trips, she requested council members contact their organization if they were aware of property owners who might allow landings on their shoreline property.

Mr. Carson gave a brief introduction to the Operation Paddle Wise education program, which emphasizes public awareness and boater safety.

Contact information for Ms. Brooks and Mr. Carson:

- mbrooks@geconsultants.com
- sailmaker101@gmail.com

5. Georgia's Nonpoint Source (NPS) Management Plan

Veronica Craw (EPD) provided an update on Georgia's NPS Management Plan, to be submitted to EPA July 2019. Ms. Craw indicated that the intent of the revision was to make the document more accessible, shorter, and less cumbersome. The revision will summarize goals and initiatives rather than provide an exhaustive list of activities.

Ms. Craw noted that both the Georgia State Water Plan as well as the Council's regional plan address NPS pollution.

6. Seed Grant Updates

Ms. Craw provided an overview of the Seed Grant application process, noting that solicitations will go out in July and the deadline for submission will be 10/31/19. She also noted that water quality grants are available under the Clean Water Act Section 319.

Council member Marcie Seleb gave an update on the 2017 litter trap project designed to collect floatables coming down the South River. After receiving an initial startup Seed Grant from EPD and raising \$50K in donations as a match, DeKalb County agreed to pay for 100% of the cost. The Seed Grant agreement was terminated with no funds spent.

Krista Capps (School of Ecology/River Basin Center, UGA) gave an update on the 2016 bromide study, noting that a source of the elevated bromide was not found. She asked the Council if they would be interested in applying the remaining funds towards a microplastics study.

Once council member asked about the size of microplastics. Ms. Capps indicated they were tiny. Another council member noted their ability to infiltrate groundwater. Ms. Capps concurred, noting microplastics are of particular concern around landfills.

Ms. Crow explained a contractual option. The contract for the bromide study could be amended, with Council support, to add microplastics to the project and then extended into the next fiscal year. She also indicated that the unspent litter trap Seed Grant funds would be returned to the state.

Council Chair asked the Contractor to draft a letter of support for the addition of microplastics to the bromide Seed Grant study.

Matt Gore provided an overview of the Gateway85 Community Improvement District (CID), noting it is the largest in the state. Seed Grant funding will be used to examine an enhanced stormwater component of the redevelopment of the Carter Oak Shopping Center. The parking lot runs off into Beaver Ruin Creek which ultimately flows to the Ocmulgee River.

7. Wrap Up & Next Steps

Council discussed the timeline and possible activities for the next meeting. Late October was tentatively selected. A tour of the Lloyd Shoals Dam and/or a kayak trip in the region were suggested.

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 2:30 pm.

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Meeting Attendees

Council

Elmo Richardson
John Bembry
Don Cook
Ben Copeland
Jerry Davis
Charlie Harris
Barry Peters
Marcie Seleb
Ron Shipman (proxy)
William Whitten
Mark Wyzalek (proxy)

EPD

Veronica Craw
Hailian Liang
Jennifer Welte
Wei Zeng

Planning Contractor

Michelle Vincent (Jacobs)
Laura Hartt (Jacobs)

Public

Brandon Baker (GA DNR-WRD)
Mary Brooks (Ocmulgee River Water Trail Partnership (OWTP))
Krista Capps (Odum School of Ecology/River Basin Center - UGA)
Katherine Darsey (GA DNR)
Matt Gore (Gateway 85)
Jen Hilburn (Altamaha Riverkeeper)
Julia Haan
Jake Hallman
Kayla Hallman
Mike Hopkins (NCWSA)
Paul McDaniel (GFC)
Courtenay O'Mara (Southern Company)
Peg Wimer (Graphic Packaging International)
Sherri Wood (OWTP)
Harold West (GA Forestry)
Paul McDaniel (GA Forestry)
Danny Johnson (Metro District)