

Memorandum

To: Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Planning Council

From: Shayne Wood and Rick Brown, CDM Smith

Date: March 17, 2017

*Subject: Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Planning Council Meeting 4
Regional Water Plan Review and Revision Process*

This memorandum provides the meeting summary of the Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Planning Council (Council) Meeting 4, held on March 1st, 2017 at the Wiregrass Technical College in Valdosta, GA. This memorandum provides a summary of the major items discussed at the Suwannee-Satilla Council Meeting 4. The meeting began at 9:30 AM and followed the Council Meeting 4 Agenda.

1) Welcome and Introductions

Council Chairman Scott Downing opened the meeting, welcomed Council Members and Guests, and asked each Council Member (CM) and attendee to introduce themselves. CDM Smith, the Planning Contractor (PC) provided an outline of the topics that would be covered during the Council Meeting. The Council approved the Meeting Agenda and the Council Meeting 3 Meeting Summary.

The PC continued with an outline of the Regional Water Plan (RWP) update review and revision schedule, which has been extended through June 2017. The PC highlighted the expectation to submit a completed public comment draft of the updated RWP to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) by March 30, 2017. The remainder of the meeting followed the agenda, and the key points and major discussion topics are summarized below.

2) Regional Water Plan Deliverables

The PC suggested that the Council consider forming an editing committee to help with review of the draft RWP before sharing the Plan with the rest of the Council to get their approval. The goal is to deliver the RWP by the March 30, 2017 deadline for a concurrent EPD and public review. The PC can address EPD and public review comments in the latter half of May and seek final, approval and adoption from the Council in June 2017.

The PC noted that the team spent a part of January working on shared resources subcommittees with neighboring Councils, including groundwater analysis with Coastal Council and surface water analysis with a focus on agriculture surface water use in areas with potential gaps.

The PC provided the Council with an overview of some of the key items that have been revised in the RWP update process. It was noted that the update is not an overhaul of plan. The PC

commented that EPD has committed to update RWP every 5 years. There are two major changes in this update; updated water demand forecasts, including a re-look at population projections, and updates to Resource Assessments for surface water quality and quantity. Round 1 population projections were driven by a faster than normal historical growth and the new growth projections are more in line with historical population trends

The PC reviewed the Demand Forecast Technical Memorandum (TM) with the Council and explained that the final draft includes more details at the County level and includes updated agriculture demands. The PC would like to get approval for the TM. The PC noted that the supplemental materials of the TM include detailed data that are used to support the development of RWP and it also contains background information documenting the methodology used. All demand sectors were updated with the exception of industrial sector because updated employment numbers were not available. It was noted that, in general, urban counties have consistent growth rates while rural counties are projected to have declining populations. The PC noted that for the agricultural forecast there were more data on wetted acreage and better information on water use from the metering program.

Question/Comment: A CM asked if there is a quorum for the Council meeting.

Response: The PC responded that we need 7 Council Member to have a quorum. The PC reminded Council Members that we derived this number based on a review of attendance and identification of "active" Council Members. It was also noted that all meeting materials and meeting summaries are sent to attendees and the entire Council for review and comment. It is assumed that the document is approved if there is no comment.

Question/Comment: A CM noted that the Suwannee Satilla Water Planning Council website is down.

Response: The PC noted that this issue has been reported to EPD. The EPD is migrating the site so the website might be down temporarily.

The PC requested that the Council consider approval of the Demand Forecast TM. The Council Chair asked for a motion and a second, which was followed by a unanimous vote to approve the TM.

The PC updated the Council with details of the RWP update. There are two versions, one with track changes and the other one is the clean version with edits accepted.

The PC suggested assigning an editing subcommittee where the PC will work with the Council to make initial edits before sending the draft to the entire Council. The edits won't require a lot of in-depth revision of sections. The PC asked the Council Members to consider participation which will involve 2-3 conference calls over the next month and a few hours review time.

3) Report on January Shared Resources Sub-Committee Meetings on Surface Water and Groundwater

The PC started the discussion of the January shared resources subcommittee meetings by providing background on the formation of the regional subcommittees, one on Surface Water

and another on Groundwater. These subcommittees were formed to provide a more focused discussion on shared resources and brought together Council Members from neighboring Councils that shared these resources. The groundwater subcommittee also included some of the larger groundwater permit holders and/or sectors of use that share the resource.

The PC first reported out on the groundwater shared resource subcommittee meeting that was held in Savannah, Georgia on January 23, 2017. This included a discussion on the changes in assumptions in the Coastal Georgia RWP, including the Floridan aquifer permit limit reduction process for the Red/Yellow Zones. In addition, the subcommittee served the purpose to encourage discussion among Council Members and permit holders regarding possible updates to the regional management practices.

The PC also reported out on the surface water shared resource subcommittee meeting that was held in Statesboro, Georgia on January 25, 2017. This included an overview of the participants that were invited to serve on the subcommittee and the PC noted that the effort was designed to get people to think about resources on a regional basis and from a more holistic perspective (use and management of the resource to meet both off-stream uses and instream needs). Additionally, given that the broad majority of the surface water gaps are associated with areas that have agricultural surface water use, the subcommittee included representatives from the agricultural water use sector, including Council Members/agricultural users from the Altamaha, Coastal Georgia, Savannah-Upper Ogeechee, Suwannee-Satilla, and Upper Oconee Regions. During the subcommittee meeting, more detailed hydrology and demand information was reviewed with the purpose of increasing the participants understanding of water use, flow conditions, and the discretization of demands geographically. The meeting also included an update from Chris Ward with the EPD Agricultural Permitting Unit. Chris highlighted the permitting program and noted that the metering program will now be combined with the permitting program and both programs will be administered by EPD. Although the subcommittee members did not give a lot of feedback regarding management practices, there were a number of questions regarding data and modeling including: How is flow measured? How farm ponds are accounted for? And several questions about the modeled gap results.

The PC asked the Council Members who served on the surface water shared resource subcommittee for their thoughts on the discussions that took place during subcommittee meeting.

Question/Comment: A CM on the subcommittee noted that some of the participants questioned the source of the data and its validity. The CM also noted that there was good discussion about having the Council consider adding members who may be younger and that representation from a younger generation might help with bringing new and different ideas to be considered. It is important to find out who might be considered for appointment to serve on future Councils and this would increase participation in the future.

Question/Comment: A CM pointed out that the farmers did not embrace the metering program because regulations were developed based on the program. There is concern because farmers think the plan will be used to regulate them. The CM suggested to develop a solution we need to get the farming community involved and be in the room for these conversations.

The PC indicated that it's important for EPD to understand the views of the Council and that EPD recognizes it is the Council's plan, not EPD's plan. The PC encouraged CMs to provide input and develop the plans for their region with their local knowledge and perspective.

Question/Comment: A CM noted that the development of the plan needs to be more transparent and the Council should try to meet in the middle with EPD's demands.

Response: The PC noted that EPD's participation in developing the plan is not for them to influence the recommendations that are being developed by the Council.

Question/Comment: EPD noted that states with water plans have an advantage in the court of law. There is an active movement on-going to address the concern that preferential treatment has been given to agricultural water users vs. industrial/municipal users. This is an attempt to bring agricultural users more in line with industrial and municipal users. The current administration issued an executive order to move the metering program from the GSWCC and bring it into EPD's jurisdiction and to address permit holders that may not have been abiding by the rules. EPD noted that they are seeking input from the Councils as this process continues. The plan should reflect what the Council wants to see.

Question/Comment: A CM noted that it seems like water policies focus more on north Georgia than south Georgia and that over time south Georgia has lost some of its political clout and that policy decisions are being driven by the larger population centers in the northern part of the State. The Council may need to re-orientate themselves, solicit participation from the next generation of farmers and focus more on education with the farmers and encourage more participation, embracing technology, and working with farmers to increase participation and get more buy-in.

The CMs had a discussion on agricultural water use. They noted that it is important to educate the farmers about the importance of MPs. The key challenge is to think about sustainability of agricultural water use and ensuring demands can be met while also meeting instream water needs.

4) Review of 2011 Decision Making Process

The PC continued the Council Meeting by defining the purpose of management practices and outlined the management practice selection process utilized in the 2011 RWP process. The PC noted that in the Round 1 planning effort Council elected to utilize a consensus based decision process but also developed a scoring process that could be used if an impasse was encountered. The PC briefly reviewed the 2011 scoring process and criteria for decision making, including selection of proposed management practices. The PC asked the Council if they were comfortable using the same selection process for management practices as the 2011 RWP process, which was to use a consensus based approach and fallback to the scoring process only if the Council came to an impasse. The Council agreed to continue to use a consensus based approach when reviewing and selecting management practices.

5) Review and Discussion of Management Practices

The PC began the discussion on management practices by first reviewing several of the "drivers" for needing management practices to address potential gaps and advance the Suwannee Satilla

region's vision and goals. The "drivers" reviewed included examples of potential surface water gaps, groundwater gaps, and water quality gaps. The first gap discussion focused on surface water quantity which included review of a figure that showed the location of the Pinetta planning nodes as an example, and its local drainage area (LDA). The PC provided a table showing land acreage/percentage of each county contributing to the LDA, the land acreage/percentage irrigated with surface water in each county contributing to the LDA, and the related potential surface water gap in million gallons per day (MGD). The purpose of the figure and table was to illustrate to the Council how to identify the areas that would benefit the most from selected management practices, such as surface water management practices associated with existing agriculture use.

Question/Comment: A CM asked a question about the hatch marks on the legend on the figure.

Response: The PC indicated that it was to designate the LDAs that contribute to a node but noted the legend on the slide was a holdover from another figure and it needed to be updated.

Question/Comment: A question was asked about the last column if it differentiates between groundwater, ponds, and direct withdrawal.

Response: The PC indicated that it works off the same assumptions made for demand forecasting, which is 70/30 split for dual source ponds.

Question/Comment: A CM asked what basin is Tift County returning its groundwater discharge into.

Response: The PC stated that returns were included in the RAs and those would be available for withdrawals. The PC will double check. The intention isn't to build fences but to share the resource and partner with neighboring Councils to discuss management practices in a collaborative way given that the resources and gaps are shared across some planning regions/councils. The goal is to get MPs down to the appropriate geographic region and type of use. Although this was shown as an example and not reviewed for every node, it is recommended to the Council to consider this more in-depth examination in the future for other planning nodes.

Question/Comment: A comment was made that that one of the MPs being considered is to take surface water users and convert them to groundwater users. Another CM questioned if converting from one resource to another resource would be the solution, because it might potentially create additional problems, elsewhere.

Question/Comment: A CM stated that in wet years things are fine but in dry years that is when issues arise.

Response: The PC noted that for agricultural demands, they were using the 75th percentile which is reasonably conservative and focused on the drier years.

Question/Comment: A CM noted that from an industry standpoint this dictates how much you can use and cautioned how sustainable yields were interpreted and suggested this could be looked at in more detail in the future.

Question/Comment: A CM asked if agricultural withdrawals were 100% consumptive.

Response: The PC noted that yes this is the current assumption being employed by.

The PC then reviewed the water quality gaps and ended with a review of estuary model results showing updated data on dissolved oxygen compared to information from the 2011 RWP. The PC discussed changes in assumptions for the modeling, which resulted in the Brunswick Harbor being projected to have acceptable water quality, while the St. Mary's Estuary is projected to have lower water quality.

Question/Comment: A CM asked if there is a rule of thumb for what is returned in comparison to what is pumped, in regards to municipal water supplies that get returned as wastewater discharges.

EPD Noted it is typically 80-85% returned.

The PC added that Dr. Booth has worked with Altamaha to look more closely at naturally low DO conditions. A CM added that it does not matter in Suwannee Satilla basin because there shouldn't be an impact upstream even if there is a DO problem. The rivers in Suwannee Satilla basin are backwater rivers. The DO is naturally lower. There is no current low DO standard.

Question/Comment: A CM asked if the RA will include stormwater BMPs in the future.

EPD noted that they do not take into account future stormwater BMPs.

The PC added that the RA does not take into account land based future stormwater BMPs. The PC suggested that the impact on receiving waters can be examined by looking at scenarios using land use, loading and planned BMPs.

Question/Comment: A CM asked why some segments do not get better in the future.

Response: The PC stated that it could be indicative of a natural condition or higher non-point source loading in those areas.

Question/Comment: A CM stated that the Little Satilla gets very close to drying up and some of it is due to beaver problems that dam off the river. What is causing the St. Mary's Estuary to be a problem in this round but it wasn't a problem in last round?

Response: The PC stated that it is difficult to fully understand the projected changes in water quality. There are not clear drivers based on a general look at Land use and point source information; the area is not highly developed.

Question/Comment: A CM asked why the analysis did not go very far upstream for St. Mary's compared to the other rivers.

Response: The PC answered that it could be a model domain constraint; sometimes the model only look at the estuarine portion of the river.

The PC advised the CMs to recommend some language that would address these questions and focus on potential BMPs.

The PC then engaged the Council in discussion and review of each of the 76 Management Practices from the 2011 RWP. The PC discussed the framework that was developed to facilitate this review, which included an initial categorizing of the Management Practices into three groupings:

- Green = no revision needed,
- Yellow = additional discussion required, and
- Red = revise or eliminate.

The MPs were discussed and suggestions for re-wording were made during the meeting, some MPs were updated or added during the meeting. The CMs were also given additional time to follow-up with the PC to make additional edits or suggestions if needed, but in general the discussion was to support the continued advancement of the current MPs as recommended, inclusive of the updates/edits/suggestions, as noted. The PC noted that the MPs would be sent to the full Council during the review process for finalizing the draft Plan.

6) RWP Schedule

The PC then highlighted the remaining schedule for the RWP review and revision process. Council agreed that it would be advisable to form an editing subcommittee and the PC would work with the Council Chair to set that up and produce the final draft updates for the full Council review.

7) Public Comments

The PC concluded the Council Meeting by asking the public/agency attendees if they would like to provide any questions or comments regarding the meeting. No public comment was received.

8) Meeting Attendance

Suwannee – Satilla Regional Water Planning Council members in attendance:

- Carol Coarsey, Ben Copeland, Scott Downing, Eugene Dyal, Mike Edgy, Brittney Hull, Rusty McCall, Jr.,

Georgia EPD Representative in attendance:

- Cliff Lewis

Regional Water Planning Council contractors in attendance:

- Shayne Wood, Rick Brown, and Danielle Honour (CDM Smith)

Public/Agency attendees:

- Kevin Wright, Generation Farms

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- Charles Nimmo, Southern Georgia Regional Commission
- Angela Bray, City of Valdosta
- Jody Redding, Senator Isakson's office
- Jim Page, Georgia DNR, Water Resources Division