

Memorandum

To: Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Planning Council

From: Shayne Wood and Danielle Honour, CDM Smith

Date: March 27, 2018

Subject: Suwannee -Satilla Regional Water Planning Council Meeting 6

This memorandum provides the meeting summary of the Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Planning Council (Council) Meeting 6, held on March 22, 2018 at the Flyin' Cowboy in Douglas, GA. This memorandum provides a summary of the major items discussed at the Council Meeting. The meeting began at 10:30 AM and followed the agenda outlined below.

1) Welcome and Introductions

Council Chairman Scott Downing opened the meeting, welcomed Council Members and guests, and reviewed the agenda. Chairman Downing reminded attendees that he is working on a list of members who would like to be re-appointed to the Council. Right now, there is a working group of a dozen members or so who are active. He will continue to engage the legislators to make re-appointments but he will do his part to help facilitate the process.

Next, the meeting minutes were reviewed. The Planning Contractor (PC) reviewed the meeting minutes from the June 2017 meeting. He reminded the Council that at the last meeting they had reviewed editorial comments on draft RWP based on comments provided by the editing sub-committee. The final draft Regional Water Plan (RWP) was then publicly noticed by EPD and only minor public comments were received. The approved plan was published/adopted in June 2017. Now, during this 5-year period, the PC will continue to support the Council to help track implementation, promote the RWP and be responsive to requests heard from the Councils. Chairman Downing called for a Motion which was given, followed by a Second, and vote passed approval of the previous minutes. Chairman Downing then asked Council Members (CM) to review the agenda. A motion was made to approve the agenda, followed by a Second and a vote passed to approve the agenda.

2) Review of Regional Water Plan Outreach Materials

The PC began this agenda item by reviewing the fact sheet that was previously distributed to the Council. The fact sheet highlights key elements of the adopted Regional Water Plan and is meant to be used as an outreach item by Council members. The PC let the CMs know that EPD's new website is active and that the fact sheet contains the updated link. The PC allowed the CMs to look over the fact sheet and asked if there were any questions on the fact sheets.

Question/Comment: The EPD representative asked if the gaps that existed in the first RWP are still present and has anything really changed?

Response: The PC responded that in general when the original plan was developed, the demand was overestimated based on the population projections at the time (GA was the fourth fastest growing state in nation and that trend was carried through in the demands). The economic downturn that occurred was not factored into the population forecast. Demands were overestimated in the first plan and were then reduced during the second round which helped close the gaps. What tends to happen with an economic downturn is that there is a behavioral change and people will use less water; once the economy changes, the behavior changes which can affect demands.

The PC then reviewed the RWP outreach presentation. The PC explained this is a canned presentation to be used for outreach purposes and we are here to support you in disseminating the information to stakeholders. The Council can identify events/forums to share information about the RWP and the PC is available to support you in those efforts.

Question/Comment: The EPD representative asked for any feedback from other Councils on what they are doing.

Response: The PC mentioned that for the Altamaha Council, one of the CMs had suggested an agricultural trade show late in the year which is an example of an opportunity to provide exposure to the RWP.

Question/Comment: Chairman Downing stated that based on the Council survey results, most people think there is a lack of educating the public on the RWP. EPD is using our recommendations from this plan to permit water use. A lot of permittees are not aware of the correlation between our plan and permit. These recommendations are being directly applied to water permits. Chairman Downing thinks there needs to be a wider reach of education other than word of mouth. It's very important for the CMs to let people know plan is being used for water permits. A lot of entities don't understand the correlation.

Response: The EPD representative stated that the plan covers all water use sectors, in the beginning there was a fear of mandates on what is in the plans. EPD wanted the plan to include options for people to consider. The process for the permit application is to ensure the permit is in line with the region the permittee is applying for and gives the applicant the opportunity to demonstrate how their withdrawal meets the intent of the plan. This also encourages applicants to become familiar with plan and what they propose becomes a condition of the permit – this is more of a voluntary exercise for the applicant. When permittees are trying to get loans from GEFA, they get higher consideration if they can relate back to the plan.

Question/Comment: Chairman Downing stated that in this area, GEFA loans are a necessity.

Question/Comment: Jody Redding from the office of U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson briefly attended the meeting and came to discuss this exact issue and stated that there are endangered species that are shutting down water use in other areas.

Response: The EPD representative stated that there are four federally protected mussels in the Flint basin. Georgia tries to protect the propagation areas and avoid a Section 10 takings

violation of endangered species in the Flint Basin. The RWP Plans allow us to address these special issues.

Question/Comment: A CM asked if there are restrictions on agricultural wells in this region?

Response: The EPD representative responded that not here, but there are restrictions in the Flint Basin.

Question/Comment: Florida is doing a lot of research to the south of us including a nitrogen study by the Suwannee River Water Management District (SWRMD). They have significant problems as far as water shortages in north Florida.

Response: The EPD representative responded that EPD is not a research agency whereas the water management districts in Florida do more of this type of work and have many more resources (i.e., research, publications).

Question/Comment: The EPD representative asked for any feedback from other Councils on what they are doing.

Response: The PC mentioned for the Altamaha Council, one of the CMs had suggested an agricultural trade show late in the year which is an example of an opportunity to provide exposure. The PC stated there are more slides than probably needed and we can help you customize the presentation to tailor it to your needs. As CMs identify events, we will be available to help you. We have provided talking points to assist CMs with the slides.

Question/Comment: Chairman Downing stated that growers from Florida are coming to Georgia to grow citrus trees because of the rot. They are using an anti-freezing system which circulates water around saplings with tee-pees. We need to pay attention to this allocation of water as it is separate from the irrigation system.

Question/Comment: A CM stated that in desert areas outside of Georgia with low rainfall, irrigation is piped to individual palms and every tree has its own line/sensor; wastewater is also being used to irrigate crops in these areas.

Response: The EPD representative stated that in Georgia, we do have variable rate irrigation systems that are implemented into the center pivot. It is gaining popularity but it is still a very expensive technology. We need to determine the mission of the audience and pare down the outreach slides accordingly.

3) Council Member Survey Results

The PC briefed the Council on the current efforts underway by the planning contractors and EPD to make recommendations to improve the regional water planning process. As part of this effort, surveys were sent out to Council Members last fall and interviews were conducted with all the Council Chairs. The draft recommendations in the action plan are currently being reviewed by EPD and the Council will be briefed once the final results are available. The survey response rate was 36% for a total of 91 responses. The PC reviewed each of the survey questions posed to Council Members and the overall resulting response for each question.

Question/Comment: Chairman Downing stated that it was interesting that responses from CMs and Council Chairs were so similar. Many of the chairs had similar concerns and he wanted the Council to see these results to show that we are not alone. He stated that he has specific opinions on funding and re-appointments and was surprised there were similar concerns. He feels that Council re-appointments need to have a greater sense of urgency. He said he will continue to press for these issues including data, funding, and re-appointments.

The PC added that there is always an option to do a joint meeting if you choose; we can customize meetings and it's always open for our CMs to go to other Council meetings. Chairman Downing stated that he thought it would be a good idea to have a joint meeting with the Coastal Council.

4) EPD Seed Grant Opportunity Review and Timelines

The PC stated that for future council meetings, we will continue to re-visit the topic of funding and keep an eye on when opportunities are coming. Chairman Downing had a good project idea for the seed grant but we ran out of time based on when the application was due.

Question/Comment: Chairman Downing stated that the hardest part is finding who can provide the funding to address impairments. At some point, these will affect downstream communities. Our region is the headwaters for three different rivers which would benefit downstream segments, but it doesn't benefit us locally. How do you convince partners to do projects upstream of impaired waters? State support would be helpful to help educate partners why a project would be useful. We need time to talk to prospective partners; it takes time to identify partners and have discussion.

Response: The PC stated that we will be your facilitator/coordinator to help you through the process.

Question/Comment: A CM stated that in the Satilla River, as you go downstream, the more impairments you have. Silt has become major issue.

The PC presented on the recent EPD Seed Grant opportunity and the grant proposal that was submitted which includes the Suwannee-Satilla region. The application was put forth by Dr. Gary Hawkins from the University of Georgia and supports activities in the Altamaha, Suwannee-Satilla and Coastal regions. The PC stated that Dr. Hawkins will also be working with the County extension agents. Dr. Hawkins' proposal was awarded funding by EPD and he is willing to come to future Council meetings to give us updates on the grant.

The PC then presented the other grant and funding opportunities including GEFA funding and the recent projects that were funded in the Suwannee-Satilla region. An overview of Clean Water loan/grant programs was provided on projects that were completed in the Suwannee-Satilla region. The PC also reviewed the Drinking Water loan/grant program as well as the Georgia Fund Loan Program and projects that were funded in the region.

Question/Comment: Eugene Dyal (Seven Rivers RC&D) stated that he would still like to look at the project he was considering during the seed grant application process.

Response: Chairman Downing would like to have a fall back project as well as broader projects for consideration, The PC stated that we can help schedule and facilitate monthly coordination call on this topic.

Question/Comment: Chairman Downing asked if anyone is working on the wastewater nitrites issue in Fitzgerald? Turkey Creek is overgrown with nitrite-fed vegetation.

Response: A CM recommended looking at soil health to identify where nitrites are coming from. From an agriculture perspective, we have crop production and forestry; forestry produces very little fertilizers.

5) Floridan Aquifer Collaborative Engagement for Sustainability (FACETS) Project -

The EPD representative then introduced Mark Masters of the Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center (GWPPC). He stated that Mark has many roles and we are very fortunate to have him here today.

Mark Masters said that this is a project that four universities are a part of and it focuses on the sustainability of Floridan aquifer. This is a source of water that is important to this region. It is a 5-year project aimed at economic sustainability. Mark described the sphere of Floridan aquifer sustainability which includes quantity, quality, economy and policy. Florida is very focused on this because of the impacts to springs in their state; areas in Georgia are part of the Florida springsheds which is a big part of this project from a water quality perspective. Georgia and Florida are separate jurisdictions with separate policies - our project area is governed by many jurisdictions.

Next, Mark reviewed project goals which included developing new knowledge to explore the relationship between the agricultural economy and environmental quality and developing tools for decision making.

A portion of the upper Floridan aquifer (UFA) that underlies the Flint and Suwannee basins is where the focus will be. We will then take field level research modeling up to a regional watershed scale; both quantitatively and from an economics standpoint. This will be used as a decision-making tool for BMP implementation, specifically how will certain decisions affect the environmental quality at the watershed level as well as the economics.

Mark stated that there are four pillars to the FACETS Project: modeling, stakeholder engagement, BMP research, and extension. They have introduced the concept of water schools which is a unique approach to educating decision makers. The group of researchers will rely on stakeholders to help establish a baseline, determine which BMPs make sense and which ones make sense to simulate in models. It is a Participatory Modeling Process (PMP), the group does not run any models unless the stakeholders approve (stakeholders include agriculture, government, conservation and extension). There will be 8 workshops over 4 years and the next workshop is in April in Albany, GA. The website for the project is floridanwater.org.

Question/Comment: Chairman Downing stated that on the economic impact side, there's a value to the aquifer and our agriculture industry and an economic value to springs/tourism in

Florida. Is there thought being given to the impact at the consumer level (tourism vs. putting food on the table)?

Response: Mark said that it is difficult to track crops grown – we cannot address that aspect very much. The economics around the person enjoying the spring and the economic value of the spring to the ecosystem - that aspect will be addressed. There is yet another level at the consumer side - not sure we can get to that as part of this effort. It will come down to policy makers and the value they place on it.

Question/Comment: A CM stated that he was excited about collaboration between Georgia and Florida. The further south across the fall line, the greater the hydrostatic pressure to come to the surface is. He cited Tampa Bay as a success story. It was the most polluted place in the world and it was cleaned up and was huge success story. The difference is you have a huge population base in Tampa Bay versus our region so the political impact is a whole lot less. Soil health is a huge issue in North Florida and South Georgia and should be looked at.

Response: Mark stated that this project is an open process and we can keep this Council up to date. The BMP is what our group is identifying and soil health rose to the top. You can have working lands that are also healthy productive lands.

Question/Comment: A CM asked where does the grant come from?

Response: Mark answered that it was a grant from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Question/Comment: A CM suggested that there should be a study of runoff from subdivisions and golf courses. Per square acre, there is a lot more pollution from those sources versus an acre of agriculture. Most golf courses are situated on waterways.

Response: Mark responded that there have been several studies like that done in Georgia focused on municipal runoff. The EPD representative stated that EPD entered into a memorandum of agreement with the Golf Course Superintendent Association - all member courses focus on what they're doing related to pollutants. 100 percent of member courses submitted a BMP plan to EPD. We have also increased the education and awareness in this area.

6) EPD Permitting Activity Updates

The EPD representative provided a legislative update. Litigation drives a lot of what is going on currently. The State of Florida asserted farmers in Georgia, by their estimates, were irrigating 100,000+ acres out of compliance with the permitting program. Georgia did not have the data to argue against this. As a result, Governor Deal nominated an agriculture compliance task force to confirm this information which also came with recommendations related to the permitting program. In Georgia, you need to ensure permits clarify what is not allowed. In terms of compliance, the state can stop anyone not in compliance through enforcement. From the data quantity and quality aspect, if farmers self-reported, we would have better data – so this responsibility is being shifted to EPD. The legislation that was put forward (SB 451) was to codify the transition of the regulation of agricultural water use to EPD (this was the only provision that stayed from the original bill). The state wanted to take repair and replacement of

meters and put those costs on the permittee and eliminate permits that are not in use. The state has very little revocation powers so we have many permits on the books that are not in actual use. So, part of this bill would be to increase the Director's revocation powers.

EPD is still responsible for all metering duties and they are trying to phase in repair and replacements responsibilities to the permittees but the program is still currently at EPD and lives in perpetuity. If farmers won't repair the meters, EPD is forced to contract that work out, which makes it very expensive. We currently have \$20M from the Governor's Water Supply Fund There is a pilot phase In Flint on how to complete the metering program with funding we had. The Flint and Suwannee basins are the most important from a metering aspect and we have enough funding for 4 years. This will allow us to complete metering on all easy installations. There are a lot of obstacles with installation as each farm has its own footprint. EPD is assessing all sites to determine the easy installation sites. The next phase will be to repair the broken meters and then determine what to do from there based on available funding. After this legislative session, we will have to bid all that work out to outside contractors.

Question/Comment: A CM commented that any unused permits should be removed as it is skewing our numbers for water use.

Response: The EPD representative stated that there are 900 meters that are missing and there is also a meter tampering provision in the bill.

8) Public Comments/Local Elected Official Comments and Next Steps/Wrap Up

There was no additional public comment. The EPD representative stated that the Satilla Riverkeeper requested a copy of agenda, the PowerPoint presentation and meeting minutes.

The PC stated that the next meeting can be outside of traditional meetings. He mentioned that the Altamaha and Coastal Councils are in the process of planning tours for their next meetings.

Chairman Downing said that we can meet quarterly if we have enough content. Dr. Hawkins wants to come to a future meeting and Council appointments/re-appointments may provide a reason to get together. June/July was targeted for the next meeting.

Eugene Dyal said that the RC&D is in the final advisory stage to review a draft plan for the 319(h) grant; he can share results of the plan with rest of Council at next meeting

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:00 PM.

7) Meeting Attendance

Suwannee- Satilla Regional Water Planning Council members in attendance:

- Scott Downing, Donald McCallum, Doyle Weltzbarker, Michael Edgy, Rusty McCall,

Georgia EPD Representative in attendance:

- Cliff Lewis

Regional Water Planning Council contractors in attendance:

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- Danielle Honour and Shayne Wood (CDM Smith)

Public/Agency attendees:

- Tom Putnam, Langdale Industries
- Eugene Dyal, Seven Rivers Resource Development & Conservation
- Bert Earley, Georgia Forestry Commission
- Ryne Nimmo, South Georgia Regional Commission
- Jim Page, Georgia DNR
- Jody Redding, Office of U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson