

## Memorandum

*To: Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Planning Council*

*From: Shayne Wood, CDM Smith*

*Date: March 14, 2023*

*Subject: Suwannee -Satilla Regional Water Planning Council Meeting*

This memorandum provides the meeting summary of the Suwannee-Satilla Regional Water Planning Council (Council) Meeting held on March 14, 2023, at the Nashville Community Center in Nashville, Georgia. This meeting also included participation virtually via the MS Teams platform. This memorandum provides a summary of the major items discussed at the Council Meeting. The meeting began at 10:30 AM, and end by 2:30 PM, and followed the agenda outlined below.

### **1) Welcome and Introductions**

Council Chairman Scott Downing, initiated the meeting, welcomed Council Members and guests, and asked each Council Member (CM) and attendee to introduce themselves. A list of the attendees is included at the end of this meeting summary. An outline of the agenda items that would be covered during the Council Meeting was then presented. Chairman Downing noted that the previous meeting minutes would be circulated to the Council members for approval (via e-mail) since there were not enough CMs present for a quorum at the time. Chairman Downing and Mr. John McCall (proxy for CM Rusty McCall) in attendance reviewed and approved the agenda.

Chairman Downing asked for an update of current flows in the Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD). Mr. Sean King (from SRWMD) noted that in 2022, there was significant rainfall that increased flows in the area, and then flows slowed in January 2023.

### **2) Seed Grant Updates (Shayne Wood, CDM Smith)**

Mr. Wood, with CDM Smith (the Planning Contractor (PC)) summarized that the Council supported two grants this past cycle (City of Valdosta and WWALS Watershed Coalition, (WWALS)), and one seed grant was awarded to the City of Valdosta. Mr. Quarterman asked Mr. Lewis to provide a copy of the City of Valdosta grant application. Mr. Wood added that if anyone would like to propose a seed grant project for the up-coming cycle, they should present their grant to the Council in August/September to provide the Council with ample review time before the grant applications are due in late October.

### **3) Lake Beatrice Update (Elizabeth Backe, Southern Georgia Regional Commission)**

Ms. Backe provided an update on Lake Beatrice. Ms. Backe was assigned to finish out the project, after some staff change over, and she recently submitted the last quarterly report and spoke with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). USACE is working on tasks 1-11, and they have

completed the first two tasks. In their latest report, the USACE estimated that all tasks up to 11 will be complete by August 2023. A No-cost time extension was submitted to coincide with the end of their fiscal year.

Chairman Downing added some additional background on the project, including going over a review of the impaired streams map and noted that the stream is not impaired to the north, but it becomes impaired as it moves south. The reason the stream is not impaired to the north is the area is not overly developed and there is a large stream flow there, including added baseflow (approximately 2 million gallons per day) from the City of Fitzgerald's wastewater treatment plant (WWTP), that discharges treated effluent back into the stream. The original source of that water is groundwater, first served to customers as potable water and then returned to the WWTP for treatment, thus the treated effluent that is returned to the stream is in some ways an augmentation to the natural flow of the system. Chairman Downing explained that a preliminary study showed that we could solve 50% of the downstream impairments by backing up water and storing it in Lake Beatrice and then letting out water at specific times, during low flows. Chairman Downing noted that the current Seed Grant study is looking into how much water could be stored in the Lake and then released during times of drought. Chairman Downing added that he would like to support future Seed Grants that are aimed more at implementing projects like this, rather than Seed Grants that are involved with studies or additional research.

Ms. Backe thanked everyone for inviting her and noted that this is a collaborative project. Mr. Wood added that it is great to have the USACE as a partner because they may be able to help secure federal funding if the project proves to be feasible and cost effective. Mr. Wood noted too that one of the tasks that Ms. Backe is working on, is how the ownership structure and operations of the project would proceed forward – would it be owned and operated by the County, City, a Utility, or some other governmental organization. It's also possible that a public private partnership (PPP) could potentially be a plausible option to consider. Ms. Backe's task includes outlining what potential options for ownership structure (including operations) would exist for the project, including defining legal aspects, etc. Ms. Backe noted that USACE would like to present to the Council, ideally in early fall. Ms. Backe will share future meeting dates with the USACE.

#### **4) Part 1 – Review Updated Draft Sections of the Regional Water Plan (Shayne Wood, CDM Smith)**

Mr. Wood updated the Council Members that all nine Sections of the Draft Suwannee Satilla Regional Water Plan have been completed and posted online. Chairman Downing has not received any emails from CMs requesting edits. Final comments from the Council must be submitted by next Friday, March 24. Chairman Scott agreed to review sections where Council comments had not been received. Sections 1, 2, and 4 did not require additional review.

- Mr. Wood reviewed the tracked changes version of Section 3. The following items were discussed:
  - Section 3 provides a high-level summary of water use in the region. Any references to “gap” was updated to “challenge”.

- New figures from Dr. Booth were updated in Section 3.
  - The modeling approach was updated, including describing the BEAM model and results
  - Groundwater modeling updates were made following Christine Voudy's presentation on the transient model and how fast aquifers recover
  - Impaired water body statistics were updated under the direction of Dr. Booth
  - Council members did not have any comments on Section 3.
- Mr. Wood reviewed the tracked changes version of Section 5. The following items were discussed:
- Most updates were related to the surface water model with BEAM
  - Mark master's updated agriculture demands were incorporated
  - Dr. Booth's updated assimilative capacity assessment maps were included
  - Chairman Downing asked why Alapaha is not included in the basin table. Mr. Wood and Mr. Lewis replied that only the major 5 basins are included, and Alapaha is included in Suwannee basin.
  - No additional council comments were received.
- Mr. Wood reviewed the tracked changes version of Section 6. The following items were discussed:
- When management practices (MPs) were originally developed, the CMs initially designed them with the intention that MPs would be offered as a menu of items that could be selected from, not with the intention that each "shall be" implemented – the intent was to offer a large variety of MPs so that local stakeholders and implementing actors could choose what to implement based on what made the most sense for their area and/or projects/needs.
  - The CMs noted that DCAR-2 would be removed from the plan as it was no longer needed.
  - Mr. Wood noted that some minor edits will still be required to reflect how Dr. Zeng has updated the modeling approach and use of the BEAM model.
  - Mr. Wood noted that many of the planning regions share resources, including groundwater and surface water. He added that one way to condense this section while still acknowledging collaboration with other regions is to add a section similar to what the Altamaha Council added. Mr. Wood shared the Altamaha Council's drafted paragraph. Chairman Downing approved of the approach and drafted paragraph.

- The planning horizon was updated to 2060, as were the short-term, mid-term and long-term planning periods/time frames.
- No additional council comments were received.
- Mr. Wood reviewed the tracked changes version of Section 7. The following items were discussed:
  - Costs previously in the plan were in 2010 dollars. The Engineering News Record is now referenced to apply an index and update costs to 2022 dollars.
  - Costs per capita were updated per new population projections.
  - No additional council comments were received.
- Mr. Wood reviewed the tracked changes version of Section 8. There were no council comments to this section.
- Mr. Wood reviewed the tracked changes version of Section 9. The following items were discussed:
  - The Bibliography was updated to include the Engineering News Record cost index.
  - No additional council comments were received.

GA EPD will post sections for the 45-day public comment period (all of April and half of May). Comments should be received by Mid-May, and at this time, Mr. Wood will circle back with Council. GA EPD noted that some public comments are typically received. Cliff confirmed the final adopted plans will be posted by June 30, 2023.

### **5) Updates from EPD (Cliff Lewis, Georgia EPD)**

GA EPD did not have any updates to share with the Council. Chairman Downing asked how permitting was going in Suwannee Satilla. Mr. Lewis estimated that about 90% of permits are groundwater permits, and over 80% are metered. All new permittees are required to have a meter.

### **6) Schedule (Shayne Wood, CDM Smith)**

Mr. Wood reviewed the high-level schedule again, confirming the 45-day review period. Mr. Wood noted that GA EPD can adopt the plan as is, adopt the plan with recommendations, etc.

### **7) Discussion**

Mr. Downing discussed appointments to the council. Mr. Downing asked attendees to submit names of anyone interested in being on the council to Shayne, and these candidates will be shared with the appointing officials for consideration. Mr. Downing added that online CMs are still participating in votes virtually.

Mr. McCall asked if it would be helpful for existing members to create lists of recommended appointments. Mr. Downing explained that this has been done previously without success. In the past, the Council has submitted attendance reports and still did not receive appointments.

### **8) Public Comments**

One public comment was received in person from John Quarterman, the Suwannee Riverkeeper. Mr. Quarterman reviewed upcoming Suwannee Satilla recreational events and he also noted that the public comment period is open for an application for a titanium dioxide mine in the Okefenokee swamp.

No online public comments were received.

### **9) Next Steps**

Mr. Wood asked if Mr. King would like to provide an update at a future meeting. Mr. King agreed to provide an update and will discuss the best date to do so. He noted that May 2023 may be too early to provide an update.

Chairman Downing thanked everyone for attending the meeting, and the meeting was adjourned.

### **10) Meeting Attendance**

Suwannee- Satilla Regional Water Planning Council members in attendance:

- Scott Downing, John McCall (proxy for Rusty McCall)

Georgia EPD Representative in attendance:

- Cliff Lewis and Sheri Almer

Regional Water Planning Council contractors in attendance:

- Shayne Wood, Emory Gawlik (CDM Smith)

Public/Agency attendees:

- Elizabeth Backe (Southern Georgia Regional Commission)
- Emily Ducker (Suwannee River Water Management District)
- Sean King (Suwannee River Water Management District)
- John Quarterman (Suwannee Riverkeeper)
- Jim Page (GA DNR)
- Maureen Metzler (PCA Valdosta Paper Mill)
- Bert Early (GFC)
- Merrill Varn (St. Marys River Management Committee)