

Memorandum

To: Savannah-Upper Ogeechee Regional Water Planning Council

From: Laura Hartt, Jacobs & Lee Smith, CDM Smith

Date: July 25, 2019

Subject: Savannah-Upper Ogeechee Council Meeting Summary

Welcome & Introductions

Chairman Ron Cross called the meeting to order. Chairman Cross led the group in brief introductions followed by a discussion of leadership transition. Chairman Cross recommended that Bruce Azevedo serve as the next Chair, and Tom Wiedmeier as the next Vice-Chair. Chairman Cross then asked the Council members for other nominations. Motion was made to accept Chairman Cross' recommendations for the new Council Chair and Vice-Chair. Recommendations were approved by motion, second, and unanimous vote.

Jennifer Welte, from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD), presented Chairman Cross with a plaque on behalf of EPD to thank him for his 10 years of service as the Council's Chair.

Council Business

New Chairman Azevedo resumed the meeting, calling for a motion to approve the joint SUO-Coastal Georgia Council Meeting Minutes (November 18, 2018) as well as the prior individual SUO Meeting Minutes (November 18, 2018). Minutes were approved by motion, second, and unanimous vote.

Ms. Welte (EPD) discussed current Council membership composition and the state's appointment process. Ms. Welte provided Council members with a handout to help guide the Council in providing appointment recommendations. Chair Azevedo requested Members provide recommendations for new appointments by September 25, 2019. Ms. Welte agreed that EPD would take Council recommendations and submit them to state leadership for consideration. Council members noted the need to involve stakeholders with knowledge of the resource, including Oscar Flite and Tonya Bonitatibus (Savannah Riverkeeper).

Seed Grant Implementation Case Study

Vice-Chair Wiedmeier and Ms. Bonitatibus, the Savannah Riverkeeper, provided an update on the 2019 Seed Grant Award to the City of Augusta, which will administer the grant in partnership with the Savannah Riverkeeper. The intent of the funded project is to collect data and develop a website that will serve as a "one stop shop" for characterizing Savannah River water quality. Ms. Bonitatibus requested input from the Council with respect to stakeholder involvement, data needs, and long-term funding

mechanisms. Council members recommended involving universities in both Georgia and South Carolina. Council members also recommended looking at non-point source pollution stemming from agriculture and forestry.

Council Updates

Mr. Smith (Contractor) provided the Council with a handout illustrating improvements proposed for the Council's website. He reviewed the proposed updates, asked Council members to provide any comments or suggestions to his attention, and stated that he would follow up with the Chair for final review.

Mr. Smith then provided the Council with a brief overview of the process, timeline and public input opportunities for the Stevens Creek FERC Relicensing. Mr. Smith noted that the license expires October 31, 2025 and that the next public meeting to review the pre-application documents will be held August 22, 2019 in North Augusta, South Carolina.

Ms. Welte (EPD) provided the Council with an overview of Seed Grant projects funded in the basin as well as the requirements and deadlines for applying for the next round of awards which support regional water plan implementation. Pre-application meetings with EPD may be conducted in person or over the phone and must be completed by October 17, 2019. Applications are due by October 31.

Laura Hartt (Contractor) led the Council in discussion of potential Seed Grant application ideas. Oscar Flite suggested funding to install cameras in agriculture areas to take photos of meter readings to accurately record irrigation usage data in a cost effective and timely manner. Larry Walker suggested funding to install watershed identification and informational signs throughout the watershed and provide a link to the Council's webpage. Ms. Hartt agreed to follow up with Council members to assist in applications as needed.

Mr. Smith provided Council members with the updated Fact Sheet for the SUO Council. Mr. Smith also reminded Council members of the availability of an outreach PowerPoint which could be tailored by Council members or Contractors for appropriate audiences, and gave some examples of speaking opportunities that might be appropriate for Council outreach.

Augusta Canal FERC Relicensing

Mr. Wiedmeier provided a quick update regarding the status of the Augusta Canal FERC Relicensing, indicating that the project is likely to proceed late 2019 or early 2020.

Lunch/Speaker: South Carolina Planning Process

Scott Harder (SC DNR) presented an overview of South Carolina's regional water planning efforts, noting distinctions from Georgia's process such as South Carolina's absence of legislation to define planning requirements and their resulting reliance on departmental guidance. Mr. Harder also noted that there is currently no sustained source of funding for regional water planning in South Carolina.

Another key distinction is that South Carolina has used hydrological boundaries to delineate planning regions, whereas Georgia relies primarily on County and other political boundaries for delineation.

As in Georgia, South Carolina's regional water planning process involves several steps, including models to determine surface water and ground water availability, water demand projections, river basin plan development, water gap identification, and recommendations.

Mr. Harder also noted that South Carolina lags Georgia in terms of plan development, with the first draft plan for the pilot basin (Edisto River) anticipated in early 2020. Mr. Harder noted that the Savannah River Basin would probably be the last basin addressed by South Carolina. At that time, he suggested that it might be beneficial for a member of GA EPD and/or the SUO Council to attend the next Savannah River planning group meeting to share lessons learned.

Council members discussed Georgia's emphasis on both surface and ground water availability and the fact that South Carolina shares both water resources. Mr. Harder acknowledged that there was overlap but noted that Georgia relies more on the Floridan Aquifer while South Carolina relies on deeper aquifers.

Ms. Welte noted that when EPD projects water demands, the agency works with South Carolina to incorporate their demands as well. She then asked if South Carolina will coordinate its forecasting efforts with Georgia. Mr. Harder said that his agency does plan on working with Georgia during Savannah River Basin planning.

Council members asked for clarification of South Carolina's water planning timeline. Mr. Harder stated that each year, his department will initiate 2-3 new regional water planning efforts until all eight of the state's river basins have been addressed.

Council members asked for clarification regarding funding and technical input during the modeling phase. Mr. Harder indicated that there is funding available for modeling and that monthly meetings are held with technical experts to review efforts.

A Council member asked for the point of contact to coordinate SUO regional water planning efforts with South Carolina. Mr. Harder indicated that he is the appropriate contact.

A public attendee noted that Georgia and South Carolina assess water quality differently and questioned how South Carolina would reconcile that difference. Ms. Welte then asked if South Carolina's Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) was involved in the regional water planning effort. Mr. Harder indicated that his department is trying to figure out how to improve coordination in that respect.

Oxbow Restoration Update

Ms. Bonitatibus gave a brief update on the Savannah River oxbow restoration project, including the history of the project, the ecological services provided by oxbows, and the timeline for project

completion. The study was on a brief hiatus but has restarted and should be completed within a year and a half. Currently, eight oxbows/bends have been identified for restoration, with three options for restoration. Savannah Riverkeeper is working with the Corps to assess the bends and determine the best restoration option for each. These bends all lie within public rights-of-way. A total of 45 bends will require restoration, and future efforts will require private landowner cooperation. Settlement funds are expected to be released to perform the restoration work once the inner harbor dredging is complete.

A Council member asked if there was precedent for the oxbow restoration project. Ms. Bonitatibus indicated that these type of restoration projects are more typical out west but that she was aware of similar efforts along the Kissimmee and Missouri rivers.

Another Council member asked if there was data to support the hypothesis that river bend restoration is beneficial. Ms. Bonitatibus indicated that the Seed Grant project will help establish a baseline data set to monitor progress.

Another Council member asked what it will cost to restore the first eight river bends. Ms. Bonitatibus said she is working on that estimate.

Update on One Hundred Miles Industrial Use Study

Alice Keyes (One Hundred Miles) provided an overview of the Industrial Water Use Study conducted by her organization. She noted that one industrial water permittee was within the SUO Region, in Screven County. In total, the study looked at a 24-county area, finding that only five facilities were withdrawing more than 10 MGD each, and that most facilities were withdrawing roughly 1 MGD each. The study also detected a downward trend in withdrawals over time. Ms. Keyes indicated that future assessments will use updated data sets.

A public attendee asked if groundwater has recovered after the decline in industrial withdrawals. Ms. Keyes indicated that saltwater intrusion appears to be stabilizing but that groundwater benefits were hard to detect otherwise.

Mr. Harder asked if Georgia has a saltwater intrusion monitoring network. Ms. Keyes and EPD indicated that both USGS and GA EPD perform groundwater monitoring.

Wrap Up & Adjourn

Chairman Azevedo asked if there were any members of the public or elected officials present who wished to provide any comments. No comments were forthcoming.

Chairman Azevedo then suggested that the Next Council meeting be set for November 7, 2019 and offered to explore potential venues on behalf of the Council. Chairman then asked Council members for topic suggestions. Council member suggestions included agricultural use modeling, South Carolina engagement, Stevens Creek FERC relicensing update, seed grant updates, and the formation of Council committees.

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Meeting Summary
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Ms. Welte noted that Contractors have an electronic survey which can be shared with Council members to solicit topic ideas.

Meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:15 pm.

Meeting Attendance

Council

Bruce Azevedo
Braye Boardman
Ron Cross
Sue Parr
Chris McCorkle
Scott MacGregor
Larry Walker
Lee Webster
Tom Wiedmeier
Tenia Workman
Scott Williams

EPD

Jennifer Welte
Haydn Blaize

Planning Contractors

Lee Smith (CDM Smith)
Ashley Reid (CDM Smith)
Laura Hartt (Jacobs)

Public

Wes Byne (Constantine Engineering)
Scott Thackston (GA Forestry Commission)
Matthew Mrozek (GA Forestry Commission)
Tonya Bonitatibus (Savannah Riverkeeper)
David Mewborn (Savannah Riverkeeper)
Alice Keyes (One Hundred Miles)
Richard Adams (The True Citizen, Waynesboro)
Scott Harder (SC DNR)
Oscar Flite (City of Augusta)