

Memorandum

To: Savannah-Upper Ogeechee Regional Water Planning Council

From: Ashley Reid, CDM Smith and Laura Hartt, Jacobs

Date: April 27, 2021

Subject: Savannah-Upper Ogeechee Regional Water Planning Council Meeting Summary (subject to Council review and approval)

Welcome, Introductions, & Council Business

Chairman Bruce Azevedo called the meeting to order at 10:03 am and welcomed the Council members. Chairman Azevedo then called for a motion to approve the prior Savannah-Upper Ogeechee (SUO) Council Meeting Minutes (October 29, 2020). Minutes were thorough, and no changes were needed. Minutes were approved by motion, second, and unanimous vote.

Chairman Azevedo called for a motion to approve the draft agenda. Agenda was approved by motion, second, and unanimous vote.

EPD Updates

Seed Grant Updates

Hadyn Blaize from EPD gave the Council a brief update on the status of the following ongoing seed grant awards:

- FY19 - Initiating and Upgrading Publicly Accessible Water Monitoring for the SUO and Coastal RWP
- FY20 – (i) Historical Analysis of In-stream Water Quantities for the Ogeechee, Savannah, Altamaha, and Oconee River Basins and (ii) Initiating and Upgrading Publicly Accessible Water Monitoring for the SUO and Coastal RWP awards

In addition, for FY21, the proposal for “Upgrading Publicly Accessible Water Monitoring for the Savannah-Upper Ogeechee RWP” (Phase 2 of a the FY19 Seed Grant) has been selected for award.

The announcement for 2022 seed grants is anticipated in July 2021, with an October 2021 submission deadline. There may be an online platform for submissions.

Appointment Updates

Jennifer Welte from EPD gave the Council an update on Council member appointments. She informed meeting attendees that there had been some appointments and reappointments from the governor’s office last month (March), and that EPD is working with Speaker’s and the Lieutenant Governor’s offices to complete the appointments process. At the next meeting, we hope to be in person and provide some orientation to the new council members.

Seed Grant Project: Water Monitoring Systems in the SUO Basin

Tonya Bonitatibus (Savannah Riverkeeper) provided an update on the seed grant project, “Developing a real-time, publicly accessible water monitoring system in the Savannah-Upper Ogeechee River Basin.” Tonya gave a progress report for the 2019 Seed Grant awarded to the Riverkeeper and City of Augusta to develop a real-time, online water monitoring system for the Savannah and Ogeechee rivers. A second round of the project will allow some additional changes and upgrades. The sponsor for the second round of the project is the City of Savannah; now both the cities of Augusta and Savannah will serve as co-owners of the project and both will have full access to the project files. Ms. Bonitatibus will begin training in early June and transitioning the online water monitoring system over to a new site, [knowyourriver.com](https://www.knowyourriver.com). Ms. Bonitatibus showed the Council members the website with current information and data.

Cherie Faircloth (Blue Ridge Environmental Defense Fund) asked if monitoring includes the Little Tennessee River in Rabun County. Ms. Bonitatibus included her contact information in the meeting chat and asked Ms. Faircloth to send her an email with her question and stated she would check to see if any data was available in that area.

Metro North Georgia Water Planning District Update

Danny Johnson (Atlanta Regional Commission) gave the Council an update on the status, progress, and schedule of the Metro District’s planning process. The Metro District is generally on the same schedule as the Councils, with Plan updates scheduled to be completed by December 2022. The Councils are ahead in their forecasting efforts, but the Metro District hopes to be caught up on forecasting by summer or fall.

Mr. Johnson also highlighted some of the Metro District’s conservation elements, such as:

- reducing long-term per capita demands by requiring use of proven water efficiency technology.
- Preparing a menu of optional programs utilities can use to implement EPD’s Drought Rule; and
- Promoting the voluntary, early adoption of new water efficiency technologies.

Mr. Johnson noted that the District will focus on more than just mandatory plumbing code adoption; instead, the District will focus on rebate programs and promoting whole home water efficiency. More information on the District’s plan update can be found in the presentation slides available on the Council website.

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Updates

Scott Harder (Hydrology Section Chief, South Carolina DNR) gave the Council an update on South Carolina’s Water Planning process. Mr. Harder noted that the South Carolina’s water planning process involves five steps: (1) surface water assessments (completed 2017), (2) groundwater assessments (to be completed 2021), (3) water demand projections (initially compiled in 2019, to be revised/updated 2021), (4) eight river basin-specific plans (pending completion), and (5) state water plan (last completed 2004, update pending).

In March 2018, South Carolina's Planning Process Advisory Committee (PPAC) convened to develop the planning framework, selecting the Edisto River Basin as the initial basin for performing updates. The membership for the Edisto River Basin Council was finalized in 2020. That Council has met 11 times to date, and meetings have been well attended by representatives from various interest groups as well as the planning team and agency partners. Mr. Harder noted that progress has been slow due to the challenges of meeting virtually.

Ultimately, South Carolina will develop plans for all eight basins in the state. He added that the Savannah Basin is being prioritized as one of the later basins in the state, so funding and planning for the Savannah Basin may not occur for another year or two.

More information on South Carolina's water planning efforts can be found here:

hydrology.dnr.sc.gov/water-planning.html.

Municipal Forecasting Results

Brian Skeens (Jacobs) gave the Council an update on the Municipal Forecasting efforts. He presented information on the methodology used to calculate water demands and compared the current demand forecasts with those from prior planning periods.

Mr. Skeens explained that the results incorporate county-to-county transfers and accounts for industrial use that relies on municipal water supplies. For each county, per capita estimates of municipal water use were derived from EPD's annual water audits. Mr. Skeens noted that the expectation is that overall per capita use will decline over time as plumbing codes are revised to reflect more efficient standards.

Results of the municipal forecasting effort may be viewed here:

<https://waterplanning.georgia.gov/forecasting/municipal-water-use>.

Energy and Industrial Demand Forecasting Results

Bill Davis (CDM Smith) gave an update on the Energy and Industrial Forecasting efforts.

Energy

A stakeholder group was convened to inform the energy forecasting effort. The process involved a top-down approach, where energy demand was determined at a state level and then allocated regionally according to forecasted need. The list of energy facilities was updated and assumes that Plant Scherer will be retired by 2040.

Mr. Davis noted that overall energy demands for the state are lower than they were during prior planning iterations. He also noted that although the demand for nuclear energy is expected to increase over time, the demand for coal-based energy is expected to decrease as coal-fired power plants are likely to be phased out sometime around 2030. Meanwhile, production of natural gas and renewable energy is likely to increase, helping to offset any unmet demands. The composition of energy supplies will determine future water demands because some supplies (e.g., nuclear and coal plants) consume more water during power generation than others (e.g., hydro, gas, renewables).

Results of the energy forecasting effort may be viewed here:

<https://waterplanning.georgia.gov/forecasting/energy-water-use>

Industrial

An advisory group comprised of stakeholders from a broad array of industries helped inform the forecasting effort. Stakeholders determined that industrial demands should remain constant over time because of improved efficiencies and automation except for poultry processing which is expected to increase over time; however, stakeholders also noted the need for the forecasts to account for additional water demands whenever new, large facilities came online.

Results of the industrial forecasting effort may be viewed here:

<https://waterplanning.georgia.gov/forecasting/industrial-water-use>

Public Question: Two biomass facilities in Franklin and Madison Counties will be coming online soon. Were these facilities included in the energy forecast?

Post meeting Response: No, these facilities are not included in the energy forecast. The future of these facilities is uncertain, and they are a component of the renewable energy generation assumed to have minimal water use. It appears that the wood chips have to be dried before being burned so the facility is probably creating its own steam from the drying process to use in the steam turbines.

Agricultural Demand Updates

Mark Masters (Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center) gave an update on the agricultural water use results and demand forecasting methods. Mr. Masters noted that the University of Georgia updated the state's wetted acreage database in 2020 and has modeled crop projections through 2060. He further noted the availability of field observation data to help with ground truthing as the field mapping by sub-watershed project expands across the state.

Mr. Masters indicated that the SUO region has some of the highest levels of water use for animal agriculture and other horticultural nurseries vs. other regions in the state, and water demands for those sectors will also be incorporated into the agricultural water demand forecast.

Final results for the agriculture water demand forecasts are still pending and will be posted here when available:

<https://waterplanning.georgia.gov/forecasting/agricultural-water-use>

Public Comments, Wrap Up & Adjourn

Chairman Azevedo asked if there were any members of the public or elected officials present who wished to provide any comments.

Cherie Faircloth (Blue Ridge Environmental Defense Fund) stated that she would like to see more focus on the Little Tennessee River.

Response: Water use data is included for the entire SUO Council region, so the Little Tennessee Rivers is incorporated in the forecasting and modeling results. Chairman Azevedo asked Ms. Faircloth to send any follow up questions or concerns she might have to him and Ms. Welte (EPD).

Chairman Azevedo then asked the Council members for recommendations for topics to include in future Council meetings and for their preferred schedule(s).

Next meeting will be tentatively planned for late July or August.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:08 pm.

Meeting Attendance

Council

- Bruce Azevedo
- Braye Boardman
- Jerry Boling
- Charles Cawthon
- Patrick Goran
- Thomas Jordan
- Scott MacGregor
- Lee Webster
- Suzanne Sharkey

EPD

- Jennifer Welte
- Haydn Blaize

Planning Contractors

- Ashley Reid (CDM Smith)
- Bill Davis (CDM Smith)
- Laura Hartt (Jacobs)
- Michelle Vincent (Jacobs)
- Brian Skeens (Jacobs)
- Mark Masters (GWPPC)

Public and Agency Partners

- Tonya Bonitatibus (Savannah Riverkeeper)
- Danny Johnson (Atlanta Regional Commission)
- Scott Harder (SCDNR)
- Heather Nix (Cooperative Extension, Clemson University)
- Gail Cowie (GWPPC)
- Lee Smith (Woolpert)
- Oscar Flite (City of Augusta)
- Callie Oldfield (Phinizy Center)
- Cherie Faircloth (Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League)