

Memorandum

To: Upper Oconee Regional Water Planning Council

From: Michelle Vincent, Jacobs and Dr. Gail Cowie (GWPPC)

Date: June 12, 2023

Subject: Upper Oconee Council (UOC) Meeting

This memorandum provides the meeting summary of the Upper Oconee Regional Water Planning Council Meeting, held at Central Georgia Technical College, 54 Highway 22 West Milledgeville, Georgia, on March 23, 2023 from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

1) Welcome and Council Business

Council Chair Melvin Davis called the meeting to order at 10:10 am and welcomed the Council and other attendees. At the Chair's request, Council members and attendees introduced themselves and said where they are from. The Chair asked for motions and seconds to approve the February 23, 2023 draft Meeting Summary and the March 23, 2023 draft Meeting Agenda. Motions were made and seconded, both were approved without dissent.

2) EPD Updates – Dr. Ania Truszczynski (EPD)

No new EPD updates since the February meeting.

3) Overview of Schedule and Status of Plan Sections, Dr. Gail Cowie (GWPPC)

Next meeting is planned for June 14th or June 16th; we will confirm the date later in the meeting.

Question: How many days are allocated for public comment?

Answer: The public comment period is for 45 days.

4) Review of Acknowledgements and Introduction, Dr. Gail Cowie (GWPPC)

The Acknowledgements section recognizes all of the Council members that have contributed to the Regional Planning process. The way in which the acknowledgements are presented was changed to separate inactive and former members from the current active members.

5) Review of Section 2: Upper Oconee Region, Michelle Vincent (Jacobs)

Revisions were made to Section 2 since the Council's initial review of the first two plan sections were minor. There was no discussion.

6) Review of Section 3 – Water Resources of Upper Oconee, Michelle Vincent (Jacobs)

Ms. Vincent reviewed the revisions in Section 3 that were made since the February meeting, which mostly resulted from technical review. A Council member asked if clarification of 7Q10 could be added (i.e., how is 7Q10 flow important to assimilate wastewater, both through dilution as well as the processes that break down the pollutants and things like BOD/COD found in wastewater). Ms. Vincent responded that we would add some clarifying language about 7Q10 and relationship to assimilative capacity.

Council members also requested that 1) a brief discussion be added to explain how chlorophyll relates to nutrients and the relationship between chlorophyll and point and nonpoint source discharges and 2) the difference between major and minor discharges be clarified. Ms. Vincent responded that we would add some clarifying language to Section 3 distinguishing nonpoint and point sources and connections between the two. We can also address major vs. minor discharges.

Question: What was process for getting information to and from municipalities and authorities?

Response: EPD collects monitoring and permitting data which were used in the resource assessments. Permitting information informs the planning process and permits are then evaluated based on plan. Planning contractors also made several requests to permittees to obtain information on future projects and other information.

Comment: On Table 3-8, the Mulberry River is missing from the list of designated drinking water sources although the Little Mulberry River is included.

Response: Yes, this was an oversight. Planning contractors will add the Mulberry River and verify that all sources are included in the table.

Comment: Regarding the planned addition of an Athens-Clarke County quarry as a water source, should this be included in the plan? At this time, Athens-Clarke County has purchased the quarry property and granted a mining lease to 2030, so the municipal supply project is not yet in the permitting pipeline.

EPD: It is always good to start the permitting conversations early and proactively, so Athens-Clarke can get the preparation started. If necessary, we can include it in the next revision of plan as a future source. Council members asked that this option be added to the plan's description of ways to meet future water supply shortages.

7) Review of Section 4 – Forecasting Future Water Needs, Dr. Gail Cowie (GWPPC)

Dr. Cowie reviewed changes to Section 4. There was one substantive change: addition of text to distinguish closed loop from open loop cooling systems. Closed loop systems consume more water but withdraw less at the onset.

Break

8) Review of Section 5 – Comparison of Available Resource Capacities and Future Needs, Dr. Gail Cowie (GWPPC)

Dr. Cowie resumed review of Section 5, including an overview of sections and topics. She noted that, in the final section, forecasted demand was compared to permitted capacity. Where there is not enough capacity, the plan identifies that as an infrastructure need. The table at the end of Section 5 summarizes the resource assessment results and the infrastructure needs.

As discussed when reviewing Section 3, the planning contractor will also add clarifying information on 7Q10, chlorophyll *a*, and point and nonpoint sources to Section 5.

The plan was also revised to consistently use the same terms throughout. The term “challenges” means that modeling indicates some kind of shortage. “Needs” is applied to infrastructure when permitted capacity is lower than demands. A definition for “potential water sources challenges” was also added to sections 3 and 5. The revisions are intended to provide a clearer description of modeling for the two components of the new surface water resource assessment: ability to withdraw water to meet supply demand and ability to discharge treated wastewater without risking violations of water quality standards.

In Section 5-2, the map of nodes has been updated. The prior revision had a figure 5-2 that showed all of the nodes. The figure has now been updated with color coding that shows which nodes have potential shortfalls.

A layout error was fixed in Table 5-3 to add correct numbers for the Social Circle facility. The text describing Table 5-3 was revised to clarify that, for the Statham facility on Barber Creek reservoir, shortages are based on lack of knowledge on size of reservoir. The model treats the unknown size of reservoir as zero, which is obviously not accurate, but we don't have data on reservoir capacity.

Table 5-4 was revised to increase clarity of results related to potential wastewater assimilation challenges. A new column was added showing the change in % time with shortages under forecast conditions compared to that under current conditions. An increase in that % time indicates an increase in the risk of violations of water quality standards. Dr. Cowie noted that only

eight facilities showed an increase in % time with shortfall. For all eight, the increase was less than 1% of time.

In discussion, Council members requested that a footnote be added to explain the meaning of negative entries in the new column and that a list of the facilities that do not have shortfalls be added.

A council member asked if the 1% threshold noted by Dr. Cowie is significant threshold for future amounts?

Response from Dr. Cowie: Language was added to say that the results do not indicate significant concerns at this time, but EPD will use the results to guide communications with permit holders about future capacity – particularly the facilities with the highest % time with shortfall.

Response from EPD: Facilities may see changes in their effluent technology limits and other more stringent permit limits. The three with the highest % time with shortages do have assimilative capacity challenges, but other facilities may also have increases in permit requirements and other changes in technology requirements over next 5 years.

Information was also added on nutrient loading to help explain the figures that present modeled evaluation of chlorophyll *a* in Lake Oconee and Lake Sinclair. The figures show modelled chlorophyll *a* levels that result from point sources and nonpoint sources. Nonpoint sources include pollutants carried by stormwater from municipal, forestry, and agricultural lands.

Council Comment: For the nontechnical reviewer, it is important to make the connection between nutrients and chlorophyll *a*.

Response: Yes, we will add some clarifying language for that purpose.

Finally, Table 5-8 was revised to include the definitions of challenges and needs described earlier.

9) Review of Section 6 – Addressing Water Needs and Regional Goals, Dr. Gail Cowie (GWPPC)

As directed by the Council leadership and discussed at the February meeting, the planning contractors completed a partial revision of Section 6-8, updating out-of-date information and adding language to explain why the sections were not fully revised. Most of the revisions to out-of-date language reflect changes in the forecasts and resource assessments.

Section 6 addresses water needs and regional goals, laying out tables of management practices to meet both. At the February meeting, the Council reviewed language explaining that the

section was only partially revised in the 2023 plan update. Planning contractors added the reviewed language in the section's introductory text and in notes on the tables.

Dr. Cowie explained that, while working on the revisions, the planning contractors became concerned that the language was not clear about why the Council chose to make a partial revision. Dr. Cowie reviewed the language added pursuant to the February meeting and offered an alternative for the Council's consideration.

In discussion, some Council members disagreed with statements in the language presented. They noted the continued participation by members from different parts of the basin, which provides important differences in perspective. The management practices are still applicable and important to reaching our regional goals and they should not be undermined by any language about a partial revision. Most management practice language is not required or regulatory in nature; Section 6 uses "encourage" and similar terms. These members support the current management practices and questioned why language about a partial revision is needed.

Other members preferred the alternative language because the Council does have a lot of vacancies. A list of candidates to fill the vacancies has been submitted to the appointing officials, but there is a disconnect somewhere and vacant seats have not been filled. The management practices include a lot of actions that impact water utilities and it is difficult to determine how practical they are without hearing from utility providers across the region. These members feel that the Council shouldn't/couldn't update provisions for the whole region without additional input. One noted that all the members represent the whole basin and have the whole basin interests at heart – but the small number of active members don't have the same knowledge as a larger number of people from around the region.

The Council then discussed the appointment process and steps that that have been taken, and could be taken now, to advocate for appointments.

EPD responded that they will work with the Council to update the list of candidates and resubmit it to Governor's office.

Dr. Cowie suggested adding some language about the robustness and continued applicability of the management practices. She offered to draft that for the Council's consideration. Council members assented to that proposal.

Break for Lunch

10) Review of Section 7 – Implementing Water Management Practices, Dr. Gail Cowie (GWPPC)

Dr. Cowie reviewed the changes made in Section 7. Language regarding challenges and needs was cleaned up, so the terms are used consistently. The language was also updated to reflect updates in the technical analysis.

As directed at the Council's February meeting, the table of cost estimates was removed, and text was added to reference the guidance documents used to produce the table. Dr. Cowie noted, however, that those guidance documents have not been updated since 2011.

Comment: Is 2011 even a good starting place for cost estimates now? The reference text should be deleted, since it is not really useful. Council members generally agreed.

The next revision noted by Dr. Cowie was in the sub-section on the Metro District's plans. As written, the language implied that every local government had to be in compliance with the Metro District plans even if they do not lie in the District, which isn't true. The Metro District plans only apply to counties and cities wholly or partially in the district. Vice Chair Graham noted that some localities have opted out of the Metro District (e.g., City of Braselton). She suggested that the language be further revised by adding a statement like "unless a locality has been formally allowed to opt out, subject to approval by the EPD Director." The Council generally concurred with this suggestion.

Dr. Cowie moved on to review the Recommendations to the State (Table 7.5). Only three of the recommendations were revised for Council consideration. First, the recommendation on appointments was revised to read "A minimum of 6-9 members should be reappointed. Vacancies should be filled by timely appointments of new members." The Council reviewed number of appointees to the Council defined by the State Water Plan 28 (three alternates) plus two *ex officio* members. Vice Chair Graham noted that one of the UOC's *ex-officio* members has retired from the legislature and would be a good addition to the list of candidates for appointment to the Council.

The second revision is in the recommendation concerning streams with naturally low DO. EPD has made some changes in the rules affecting these streams and in the implementing policy. The revision updated the Council's recommendation to reflect these changes. In EPD's most recent water quality assessment (2022), only six segments in the Oconee Basin are included due to DO violations and two of these are listed as assessment pending because information is needed on natural DO. All of the six segments are in Central or South Georgia. *[Note: The number of DO-listed streams mentioned at the meeting was incorrect; the information here is correct based on the most recent assessment.]*

Finally, the Council's recommendation to refine the resource assessment models to produce results at a finer resolution has been accomplished for the surface water availability assessment. The recommendation was revised to specify the groundwater availability assessment.

The Council generally concurred with these revisions.

11) Review of Section 8 – Monitoring and Reporting Progress – Dr. Gail Cowie (GWPPC)

In Section 8, we updated terms as discussed previously to use "challenges" and "needs" consistently and to correct inaccurate language. In the plan updates sub-section (Section 8-3), the last sentence was revised to include "current Chair and Vice Chair." There was no discussion of these changes.

12) Review of Additions to the Plan – Dr. Gail Cowie (GWPPC)

Dr. Cowie reviewed the changes identified by the Council during the meeting and committed to making as many of those changes as possible by the deadline for submission to start the public comment period. The remainder of the changes will be made concurrent with public comment and brought to the Council for final review at the June meeting.

Jennifer Welte with EPD noted that they would review the information on interconnections that was used in the forecasts (e.g., the Auburn-Winder quarry project) and see if any changes to plan language is indicated. If so, she will bring a recommendation to the Council's June meeting.

13) Review of Executive Summary, Dr. Gail Cowie (GWPPC)

Like the rest of the document, changes in language have been updated and any inconsistencies have been addressed. Updated charts show a summary of water and wastewater demands. For the water and wastewater demands, municipal increases are projected to be highest.

Table ES-2 is the same as Table 5-8 and reflects the changes discussed earlier. The language has been cleaned up and the "Yes" entries that indicate challenges or needs have been updated.

We also have a new cover for this plan. We are still in the process of updating the bibliography. Appendix A summarizes all changes that were made from 2017 to 2023 plans. Appendix B is a new appendix which summarizes metrics from seed grant on values and benefits from the waters of the Oconee basin. As described at the February meeting, the grant produced flow metrics for recreation and for aquatic habitat and species; these are included in Appendix B for future Water Council consideration.

14) Adoption of Draft Plan

The Chair thanked the planning contractors and EPD for their hard work, adding that this endeavor was a substantial task. The Chair asked for a motion to adopt the Council's draft plan for public review. It was so moved and seconded. All were in favor and motion passed without dissent.

The Chair thanked participants who joined via Zoom as well.

15) Next Steps

At this time, any additional comments on any plan sections will not be included in the plan that is released for public comment but can still be included in final version of the plan.

The next Council meeting will be scheduled for June 14, 2023.

16) Public Comment

Chair Davis asked if there were any comments from council members or members of the public or local officials.

Vice Chair Graham expressed her thanks to everyone who has worked hard on this plan update, acknowledging that a lot of work that has gone into this update. She thanked everyone and said she was very glad to be part of the effort.

Ms. Carol Flaute with the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) informed the Council that NEGRC is in the process of updating their Regional Plan and will be going out for public comment as well. Ms. Flaute will send their draft plan to the Planning Contractors for distribution to the Council. The Regional Commission welcomes the Council's thoughts and input. The NEGRC's Regional Plan mentions the Upper Oconee Council several times as a potential partner and references the existing 2017 plan. They will update the references in the Regional Plan to recognize the 2023 Water Plan update.

The Chair encouraged Council members to please think of suggestions for who might serve on the Council in the future and to send the names to EPD and/or planning contractors, so they can update the list of recommendations for the nominating officials.

A Council member expressed doubt that local water authorities understand the entire cost of creating new water supply, which can include wetland mitigation as well as the cost of new real estate development. The Chair noted that the Water Council can act as a resource for counties,

suggesting that it is useful for the Council to advise water authorities. In the future, the Council can invite local water officials as guests to Council meetings to discuss what is needed and what could be done. There was general agreement from Council members in the room. Dr. Cowie asked if there were any suggestions for localities to invite first. Jackson County was suggested, since it has a high growth rate. Dr. Truszczynski recognized that it is good to think ahead like that and suggested that EPD's Water Supply Program could also provide useful information.

A Council member asked how interbasin transfers are looked at by EPD. Dr. Truszczynski replied that interbasin transfers are challenging and bring additional considerations related to downstream neighbors, but the practice is common in some localities where discharge and withdrawal points lie in different basins.

The Chair thanked the meeting organizers, speakers, and participants for joining the meeting.

17) Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 1:50 pm.

Meeting Attendance

Council Members

- Melvin Davis (Chair)
- Pat Graham (Vice-Chair)
- Stuart Cofer
- Hunter Bicknell
- Danny Hogan
- Charles Armentrout (online)
- Jennifer Davis (online)
- Lenny Brame (GA Power proxy)

Georgia EPD Staff

- Anna Truszczynski
- Jennifer Welte

Public Attendees and Agency Partners

- Carol Flaute, NEGRC (online)
- Paul McDaniel, GA Forestry Commission

Planning Contractors

- Gail Cowie, Water Planning and Policy Center
- Michelle Vincent, Jacobs
- Brian Skeens, Jacobs (online)