

Memorandum

To: Upper Oconee Regional Water Planning Council

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

Date: June 14, 2023

Subject: Upper Oconee Council (UOC) Meeting (subject to Council review and approval)

This memorandum provides the meeting summary of the Upper Oconee Regional Water Planning Council Meeting, held on the Zoom platform, on June 14, 2023 from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM.

1) Welcome and Council Business

Council Vice Chair Pat Graham called the meeting to order at 10:00 am and welcomed the Council and other attendees. The Chair asked for motions and seconds to approve the March 23, 2023 draft Meeting Summary and the June 14, 2023 draft Meeting Agenda. Motions were made and seconded, both were approved without dissent.

2) EPD Updates – Jennifer Welte and Dr. Ania Truszczynski (EPD)

Jennifer Welte gave the Council a short update on Council Appointments: Governor Kemp and the Governor's staff completed some reappointments to the Water Council, which include the Council Members currently on the call. EPD will continue to work diligently to complete appointments to the Council. EPD also will work with Chairman Davis to get a reappointment letter out to Council members.

Dr. Truszczynski gave the Council an update on seed grants. The new seed grant deadline is on Oct. 31, 2023. Interested parties should plan to schedule a pre-application meeting with the grants unit prior to applying. New this year, applicants must use a new electronic portal to submit applications. More information on the process and the new electronic portal is on EPD's website. All applications and attachments must be completed by 10/31/23. The EPD contact for Grants is Ms. Joyce McClain.

3) Public Comments on Draft Plan, Dr. Gail Cowie (GWPPC)

During the formal public comment period, the Draft Upper Oconee plan received comments specific to our region from four people. One comment specific to the Upper Oconee Region was received after the public comment period and two commenters submitted comments on all the plans. The planning contractors are preparing a comment response document on behalf of the

Council to include a draft response to commenter, and any recommended plan revisions the Council decides upon.

Comment 1 – comment received from Carol Flaute, North East Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) recommended including a reference to the Regional Commission's enabling legislation. The recommended plan revision incorporates a reference to OCGA 50-8-32. The Council had no objections to this proposed revision, and no additional suggestions or questions about draft response.

Comment 2 – comment received from Charles Hawkins, re: interbasin transfers, specifically in Social Circle, an interbasin transfer from Strouds Creek to Little River. Recommends a cooperative effort between local governments. The draft comment response includes information on how EPD tracks inter basin transfers, which are tracked through withdrawal permitting, which then in turn feeds into forecasting and resource assessments. Statewide, a significant number of municipal and/or county jurisdictions lie in two watersheds.

Comment 3 – comment received from Charles Hawkins, re: interbasin transfers, specifically regarding Newton County's transfer from Cornish Creek to Little River. Mr. Hawkins's comment also referenced the Rivian development, and indicated that he felt it was not addressed as it should be in the plan. His comment also recommends some additional cooperative efforts between governments. The planning contractors have developed the same response, recognizing both comments, including information on how EPD tracks interbasin transfers (All permitted interbasin transfers are tracked via permitting and incorporated into forecasting and resource assessments). Council members agree that no changes to the plan are needed. A comment from a Council Member reiterated that many of these interbasin transfers are nominal, and not uncommon across the state.

Comment from Zoom chat, Cassidy Lord, Upper Oconee Watershed Association: I would like to highlight that there are inter-basin transfers occurring in the Upper Oconee Basin where water is pulled from the Middle Oconee, stored in Bear Creek Reservoir, and released into the North Oconee River after use and treatment.

Comment 4 – comment received from Jerry Hood, Barrow County. Mr. Hood's comment was in regard to comparing the wastewater needs from the 2017 plan and the 2023 plan. In comparing the two, the projected wastewater need decreased from 9.78 in 2050 (2017 plan) to 5.72 in 2060 (2023 plan). After some research, the planning contractors determined that the differences in the estimates are caused by changes in the way septic usage is estimated for the

future of the region. In 2017, the septic usage was predicted to decline from 68% in the region to 35% in the region over the planning horizon, thus necessitating additional wastewater treatment capacity. This is a substantial decline (more than 30%) that is not likely to take place, so for 2023 estimates, in absence of specific, noted additional wastewater projects, the septage percentage was held as a constant across the planning horizon. As local governments develop new wastewater projects, they will be factored into the next round of forecasting before the next round of plans (2028). Additional specific wastewater or sewerage plans can also be incorporated then.

Dr. Cowie asked the Council if they thought any revisions to the plan were needed in response to the comment. Vice Chair Graham commented that plan revisions were not needed, since the forecasts will be re-evaluated again in 5 years. As indicated in the plan, the permitted capacity is sufficient, and none of the facilities looking to expand currently would be prevented from moving forward with additional capacity for permitting.

A Council Member commented that that level of change does seem unusual, asked if the plan should be more specific about stating the reason for the decline.

Vice Chair Graham commented that, for example, the Eastern portion of Barrow County will remain very rural and is not projected to have any additional sewerage in the area.

Dr. Cowie noted that, if we made clarifications to the plan for Barrow County, we may need to make customizations for each county with regards to wastewater and septic.

Vice Chair Graham stated that each county will likely have different factors that influence the percentage changes in septic, so would be difficult to put changes in for each county, as there are too many variables, and every county is different.

Dr. Cowie suggested the Council could look at these wastewater variables in a future council meeting.

Vice Chair Graham commented that having our council back to full strength so we have every county represented would make the plan stronger and more realistic. The next plan will be a better update if and when we get everyone up to the table.

Council Member Armentrout said the Council should definitely provide the commenter, Mr. Hood, a fairly detailed explanation of why the numbers are different in the new plan. Mr.

Armentrout would be willing to review an expanded response to Mr. Hood's comment with some additional detail.

Dr. Cowie indicated that additional specifics are available on a county-by-county basis in the municipal forecasting report (www.waterplanning.georgia.gov). For example, Barrow County septic wastewater numbers increase over the planning horizon. Detail from Municipal Forecasting report: Barrow Co: Point source: 2020 @ 2.79 mgd, 2060 @ 5.72 mgd. Septic: 2020@ 4.76 mgd, 2060 @ 9.76 mgd.

Additional NEW Comment - One additional comment was received after the comment response memo was sent to the council, regarding the population projections for Athens Clarke County. The feedback from Athens-Clarke County said the forecasted numbers are too low, and referred to a new Service Delivery Plan adopted in 2020.

Dr. Cowie shared with the council that it is very difficult to change forecasted demand at this late stage. The population forecast from OPB may use a different method from that used by the county, and this is only one factor that would make the water/wastewater forecasting different. However, the Council could add references to Athens-Clarke's Service Delivery plan to the Plan and, when forecasting is done for the 2027/2028 plan revision, associated information could be incorporated. This comment also is related to the potential water supply project using a decommissioned quarry project that is in the works.

Mr. Armentrout: Representatives from Athens Clarke County used to participate more in the planning process, and attend meetings and provide feedback, but have had turnover in utilities and have not been as involved. He also discussed the projections in relation to the service delivery plan. The service plan for Athens Clarke County is to eventually provide sewer service to the whole county, so this may be different from the way the wastewater forecasting was performed for the 2023 plan related to assumptions about septic service.

EPD reiterated that it is very difficult to change forecasting at this late date. The forecast was finalized in 2022 and is included in the regional plans and the forecasting report. The forecast results also feed into the resource assessments that have been completed for the plans. The forecasting information has also been incorporated into an online dashboard for use by the public.

Dr. Cowie presented options for revision of Section 4 – a few minor additions to Tables 4-2 and 4-3 and a wording addition to Section 4.1.1 and Section 4.1.2.

Dr. Truszczynski: EPD looks at a variety of specific items when establishing the need for water projects and will work with Athens to initiate discussions on the process.

Suggestion from EPD: EPD suggested that where it appears, to change “2028 plan revision” language to “next plan revision”. We will likely have a 2027 date for the next Plan revisions.

Vice Chair Graham and Council Members Bicknell and Armentrout expressed their support for the changes and no Council member voiced opposition. Mr. Armentrout will pass the changes made on to Athens-Clarke County. Mr. Armentrout says the County will appreciate the fact that the Council has added this language and won’t have any problems with the wording.

4) Comments on All Plans, Dr. Gail Cowie and Jennifer Welte, EPD

Comment 5 – comment received from Peter Mulholland USFWS. Mr. Holland’s comment addresses priorities from Georgia’s State Wildlife Action plan and the USFWS. He requests that the plans include more current info on imperiled species.

Dr. Cowie presented a draft response to commenter that suggested a brief plan revision to explain information related to threatened and endangered species, with details on the species of greatest conservation need in the Upper Oconee Region.

Council Members Bicknell commented that he is ok with the wording suggestion, but asked to what extent does the council get involved with wildlife and plants? He supports the revised text, but does not see an expanded role for council related to endangered species.

Mr. Armentrout gave a general statement that any further level of detail related to rare and endangered species doesn’t apply to the plans themselves.

The Council concurs with EPD sending a response on their behalf. The Council generally concurred with these revisions.

Comment 6 – comment received from Dr. Amy Rosemond, UGA. Dr. Rosemond’s comment concerned representation on the Council, and called specifically for additional expertise with water management. She commented that the business interests related to water were disproportionately represented on the Council. She commented that there is a limited recognition of GA’s water conditions and water quality, and called for a better connection between water quality and monitoring and planning.

EPD has drafted a thoughtful response to this comment that also includes encouraging Dr. Rosemond to suggest individuals to be nominated for appointment to the Council. The Council concurs with EPD sending a response on their behalf.

There are no recommended revisions to the plan at this time. The Council generally concurred with no revisions.

Council Member Armentrout suggested getting Dr. Rosemond further involved with the Council in the future.

5) Other Revisions Since March Meeting

Dr. Cowie presented several revisions requested by the Council at the March 2023 meeting that were not incorporated into the plan in time for the Public Comment period. We will also present a few revisions based on the internal (planning contractor) technical review.

Section 3.2.1 – Surface Water Quality. Additional language was added to clarify the meaning of assimilative capacity. The text was also reviewed to further distinguish point vs nonpoint sources.

The text was also revised to add a sentence to clarify how nutrients and chlorophyll *a* relate to each other.

Section 3.2.2 – Table 3-3. A note was added to the table to clarify that land application systems are not included. Also, the number of wastewater facilities was corrected to 44 facilities, 27 with challenges.

Section 3.2.2 – Table 3-5. Added a note to the table with the names of facilities that do not show wastewater assimilative challenges. Mr. Armentrout questioned if Piedmont Water was included under the municipal information.

EPD (Ms. Welte) response, in chat later: In response to Council Member Armentrout's question about Piedmont, there are 4 permits issued to the Piedmont Water Company in this region and they are all LAS systems (so therefore not analyzed for water quality challenges in the surface water modeling). They include: the Carey Station Urban WRF and Reynolds Plantation Urban WRF in Greene County, and the Great Waters at Reynolds Plantation and Oconee Crossing facilities in Putnam County.

Section 3.3.1 – Table 3-8. This table was updated with current list of waters. Six water bodies were added and 1 was deleted (was actually in the Savannah- Upper Ogeechee Water Planning Region).

Section 5.2 – The numbers of wastewater facilities analyzed was corrected as well as the number with challenges, and a note was added to clarify that land application systems are not included.

Section 5.2 – A list of facilities that do not have wastewater assimilation challenges was added, the same as change for Section 3.2

Section 5.2 – Surface Water Comparisons. Rock quarries were listed as a future potential water source. A variety of management practices can address future challenges, such as interconnections, drought management, development of alternate water supply sources like quarry projects undertaken by Athens-Clarke County and the Cities of Auburn and Winder, and development of new water supply storage.

Section 5.3 – Clarifications was added describing pollutant loading and assimilation, same as change to Section 3.3.

Section 5.2.1 – Nutrient Loadings. To increase clarity, the references to major and minor were deleted.

6) Revisions from Technical Review

Section 3 – Language was added to clarify the meaning of exceedances. The node numbers were deleted on maps to lessen visual clutter.

Section 5 – Node numbers were deleted on maps to lessen visual clutter.

Section 9 – References were updated and added for per capita water use and wastewater discharge in self-supplied households, and the references to the technical reports documenting surface water and water quality resources assessments were updated.

7) Public Comment

Vice Chair Graham asked if there were any comments from council members and hearing none, moved on to public comment.

Vice Chair asked if there are any public comments from members of the public or local officials. There were none.

8) Adoption of Final plan

The Vice Chair asked for a motion to adopt the Council's 2023 Revised Final Plan. It was so moved and seconded. Quorum was not in place; however, all council members present voted to adopt the plan.

Facilitator's Note: A follow-up vote was conducted by email. Email responses from Council members exceeded the quorum threshold and the motion to adopt the Council's Revised Final Plan passed without dissent.

9) Next Steps

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

The planning contractors will send a copy of the slides and summary of the Zoom chat comments to Council members.

The next Council meeting is not currently scheduled, but the planning contractors will work with the Chair and Vice Chair on next steps, in anticipation of a meeting in Fall 2023.

10) Adjourn – Meeting adjourned at 1:50 pm

Meeting Attendance

Council Members

- Pat Graham (Vice-Chair)
- Rabun Neal
- Charles Armentrout (online)
- Hunter Bicknell

Georgia EPD Staff

- Anna Truszczynski
- Jennifer Welte

Public Attendees and Agency Partners

- Carol Flaute, NEGRC (online)
- Paul McDaniel, GA Forestry Commission
- Bryce Jaeck, City of Madison
- Debra Dooley, Upper Oconee Watershed Network
- Scott Griffith, Agronomy at UGA Golf Course
- Cassidy Lord, Upper Oconee Watershed Network
- Yul Anderson
- Chris Henry

Planning Contractors

- Gail Cowie, Water Planning and Policy Center
- Michelle Vincent, Jacobs