



Meeting Summary

Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Regional Water Council Meeting

Jones Center at Ichauway – Newton, Georgia

April 11, 2019

Welcome & Introductions

Council Chair Richard Royal welcomed everyone to the meeting and emphasized the importance to the Council of input from stakeholders in the region. He introduced Kier Klepzig, Director of the Jones Center at Ichauway, who welcomed the meeting participants and gave a brief overview of research activities at the Center. Next Chairman Royal said that the meeting was designed as a workshop for water systems and local governments in the region to begin a discussion on water issues in the region.

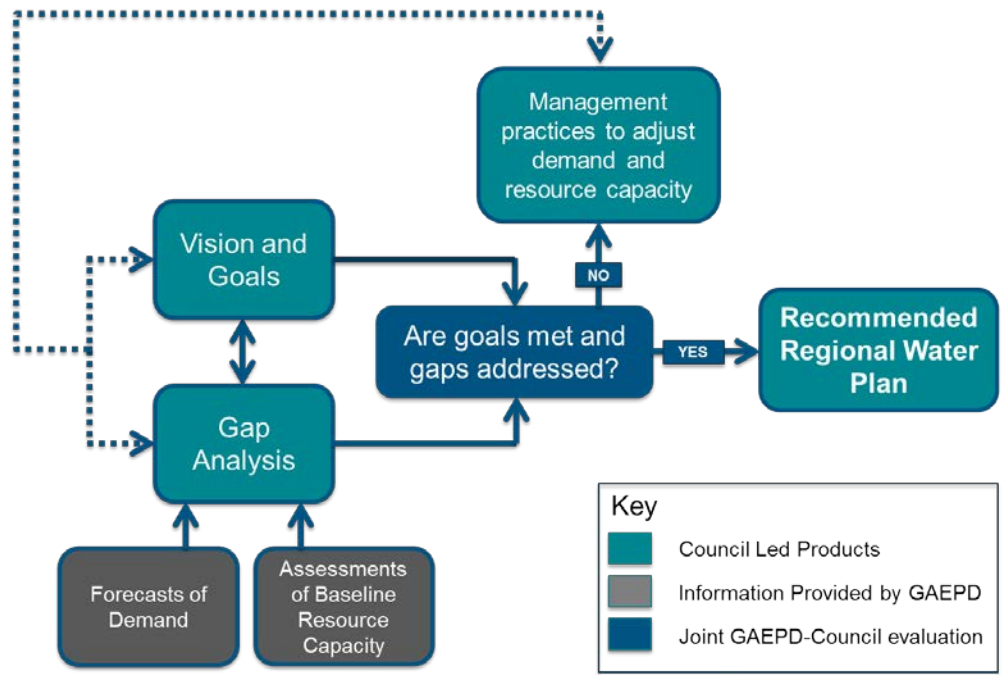
Kristin Rowles (Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center) also welcomed the Council members and attendees to the meeting and asked that the invited participants join the Council members at the table. She then asked each person to introduce themselves. Kristin Rowles next reviewed the meeting agenda. She noted that the meeting includes Council members, local government officials, and grantees that are implementing projects to support regional water plan implementation. Also present were representatives of the GA Environmental Protection Division (EPD) and the planning contractors for the Council from Black and Veatch (B&V) and the Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center (GWPPC). She said that the purpose of the workshop was to get to know each other, learn about regional water planning, and provide input to support the next round of regional water planning. The workshop was designed to foster understanding and communication about the regional water plan and its implementation.

Regional Water Planning in the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee

Kristin presented slides to describe the regional water council and explain the process of regional water planning. A copy of her presentation is available. Kristin noted that the Council has been working on regional water planning for ten years, since March 2009.

She explained how the regional water planning process was developed as recommended in the State Water Plan of 2008. There are ten regional water planning Councils across the state to develop water plans for their regions. Additionally, water planning in the metropolitan Atlanta area is managed by the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District. Water planning council members are appointed by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker of the House. The Lower Flint-Ochlockonee region includes 14 counties: Baker, Calhoun, Colquitt, Decatur, Dougherty, Early, Grady, Lee, Miller, Mitchell, Seminole, Terrell, Thomas and Worth. The region includes parts of the Flint, Chattahoochee and Suwannee River Basins.

Kristin described the process of regional water planning and referred to the diagram below, which provides a summary of the process. She reviewed the Council’s vision and the water demand forecasts and resource assessments for the region. The Council bases its planning on these components and determines what management practices and recommendations are needed. Kristin reviewed the plan’s high priority management practices and recommendations to the state.



EPD & Regional Water Planning

Kristin asked Gail Cowie (EPD) to explain how the regional water plans are used by the state. Dr. Cowie offered a note of thanks to the Council members for their commitment to the planning process and highlighted the investment of time in the plans. She reinforced the importance of the Council’s work and recommendations and provided examples of how Council

recommendations have influenced state technical work and other planning support. Gail next described the permitting processes which consider the regional water plans in permitting decisions. She said that EPD references the regional water plans in decisions on water withdrawals and wastewater discharges. It was also noted that the plans are considered by the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) in decisions about loans for water projects.

Next, Gail distributed handouts about sources of state funding for water projects. One source of funding is the Seed Grant Program, administered by EPD, which supports implementation of the regional water plans. Each year, the Council can support proposals from the region for these grants. Kristin described several of these projects from this region by the Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center, the University of Georgia Strippling Irrigation Research Park, and the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District. She said that many other projects in the region also support plan implementation, and these include Section 319 grant projects. The Golden Triangle Resource Conservation and Development Council has implemented three such projects in the region in recent years. Kristin encouraged attendees to consider potential projects for the Seed Grant and 319 grant programs.

Regional Water Plan Perspectives Panel

Kristin asked Council members Connie Hobbes, Steve Singletary, Calvin Perry and Jim Quinn to offer their perspectives on the planning process. The panel discussed the following questions:

- What motivates you to participate in the regional water planning process?
- What would you like to learn from local governments in the region that would inform you for the next round of regional water planning?

Then, the panel addressed questions from the workshop participants. The following is a summary of the discussion:

- *The agricultural water metering program has been critical to knowledge about agricultural water use. Some agricultural users have had meters since the 1980's. Continued commitment to that program is important.*
- *Significant agricultural irrigation efficiency improvements have been made in the region.*
- *Council members have more confidence in the water quantity and quality models used to support regional water planning than they did in the early part of the planning process.*

- *Implementation of a tiered rate structure can have positive impacts on water conservation.*
- *Aging infrastructure in the region’s municipal water and wastewater systems is leading to leaks and infiltration. The problems are costly to fix. Grant funding is available, but priority is set for low-income areas, and infrastructure is just as bad in mid/high income areas. Meeting matching requirements for grant programs can be tough for small communities.*
- *The Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) has made numerous loans in Southwest Georgia at low interest rates. GEFA offers debt-forgiveness on some of its loans, and some communities in the region have benefitted from that program.*
- *Council members should communicate with local government officials concerning the importance of water infrastructure projects and possible funding through various sources, including Special Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds.*
- *Hurricane Michael had a big impact on the region, and the region is still recovering. There are uprooted trees in streams; generally, wet weather is causing problems with drainage in the region.*
- *Maintaining dirt roads is important to water quality. Ditch maintenance in areas with sandy soils is a continuing challenge.*
- *Development can exacerbate storm drain issues.*

Agricultural Water Use and Efficiency

Mark Masters (GWPPC) presented slides about agricultural water use in the region. His slides are available. Overall, agricultural water demand is up, but surface water use is down. He described the water efficiency practices used by farmers in the region and the levels of adoption of these practices. He said that, in general, farmers are using more efficient irrigation equipment and improved technologies. The state currently has over 12,000 agricultural water meters in place and is in the process of surveying the meters to be sure they are functioning properly. GWPPC maps irrigated acreage associated with agricultural withdrawal permits and supports the survey of meters to identify needs for installation, repair, and replacement. To date, the state has visited 7,000 sites for water meters in the Flint, Chattahoochee, Suwannee, and Ochlockonee River Basins.

The following is a summary of the discussion of the presentation:

- George Vellidis and Calvin Perry discussed seed grant projects by UGA’s Stripling Irrigation Research Park and the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District to develop improved water efficiency technology (e.g., Variable Rate Irrigation) and to

educate county extension agents about available agricultural water efficiency technology to support them in sharing those technologies with farmers in their region. One Council member gave an example of water conservation using this technology that eliminated irrigation on 34 acres out of a 200-acre field.

- Support for research on agricultural water efficiency is very important to this region.
- The state has invested from its limited resources on getting more and better data on agricultural water use; they have made getting that data a priority.

LUNCH BREAK

Update on Florida v. Georgia Litigation

Following lunch, Dr. Cowie provided members an update on the *Florida v. Georgia* Supreme Court litigation. In remanding the case back to the special master in June 2018, the Supreme Court outlined a list of specific questions for additional consideration. A new special master, Judge Paul Kelly (Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals), was appointed by the Court in December 2018. Judge Kelly is currently reviewing summary briefs submitted by each state and is considering a request by Florida for oral arguments.

Group Discussion – Regional Water Successes, Challenges and Opportunities

Kristin led a discussion to provide Council members with ideas and considerations for the next round of regional water planning. She summarized suggestions for the Council to consider from the morning discussions and asked the group to offer any additional suggestions. She also asked the grantees to offer any suggestions that they had for the Council based on their work on their projects in the region. The following is a summary of the discussion:

- Because of aging infrastructure, inflow and infiltration are major issues for wastewater systems in the region, and water systems have issues with leaks. These problems are expensive for small communities to address.
- Drainage in the region has been impaired recently by the impacts of Hurricane Michael, and wetland areas are expanding.
- Seed grants and 319 grants related to water supply alternatives, agricultural water use efficiency, backroad management improvements, and watershed protection have helped to implement improvements aligned with the goals and recommendations of the regional water plan.
- At least one municipal system in the region faced concerns over supply reliability in the last drought. The system's groundwater well did not recharge quickly enough to keep

pace with demands. Supply reliability is a concern for the next drought (e.g., Lee County).

- Outdoor watering restrictions during drought only apply to water system customers and not to people using private well water. This can create confusion for the public in understanding and responding to drought communications.
- Feral hogs are a concern for water quality and wildlife habitat in the region.
- While a lot of attention is focused on water availability in this region, water quality is also very important, and more focus should be placed on practices to protect water quality in agriculture and land development.
- Seed grant efforts on agricultural water efficiency practices can be supported in the region by promoting adoption of efficiency practices and by supporting incentives that facilitate adoption (e.g., Variable Rate Irrigation, Irrigation Scheduling, soil moisture sensors). Funding can be a limiting factor for adoption; a Variable Rate Irrigation system can cost \$25,000 to \$30,000 per center pivot irrigation system.
- “Better Back Roads” programs improve water quality and decrease costs for road maintenance. The adoption of this approach should be encouraged and supported in the region.
- Golden Triangle has developed watershed management plans for three sub-watersheds in the region. These plans address water quality concerns by identifying sources and needed improvements, supporting implementation of best management practices, and providing training in best management practice implementation.

Looking Ahead to the Next Planning Cycle

Kristin said that the next round of regional water planning will begin in 2021. Until that time, the Council is working to educate people in the region about the regional water plan and to engage in discussions with stakeholders that will inform the next round of planning. Kristin asked workshop participants to consider three potential follow-up opportunities to today’s workshop:

- Request a presentation from the Council and its planning contractors about the regional water plan for an audience in the region. Kristin said that the planning contractors would be happy to help make arrangements to support and expand communications and outreach in the region.
- Help to develop an idea for a Seed Grant (or other grant program) proposal to support implementation of the regional water plan. Kristin said to get in touch with her with project ideas for help in identifying partners, addressing regional water plan priorities, and seeking support from the Council on project proposals. The Council would like to

see more proposals from the region that support the implementation of the regional water plan.

- Attend future meetings of the Council.

Kristin asked if anyone had closing comments for the workshop:

- Council member David Dixon offered that the opportunity to interact with the Council’s “customers” was a great learning experience and suggested that we have similar structured meetings in the future. David also mentioned that Golden Triangle and Flint Riverkeeper can do water quality testing if potential issues are identified.
- Council member Connie Hobbs thanked the planning contractors for their work.
- Steve Sykes (City of Camilla) commented that staying engaged with the “shareholders” in the community should remain a priority for the Council.
- Steve Golladay (Jones Center) commented that while concerns about drainage are important, the presence of wetlands in the region is important for maintaining and improving stream baseflow.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Next Steps

To close the meeting, Kristin thanked everyone for coming to the workshop and for being active participants. She said that the discussions were good input for the Council to consider in its future regional water planning. Chairman Royal thanked everyone for their participation and contributions. He noted the importance of the input received. The meeting was adjourned.

Council Members Attending April 11, 2019 Meeting

Richard Royal, Chair	Phil Long
Steve Bailey	George McIntosh
David Dixon	Calvin Perry
Connie Hobbs	Jim Quinn
Huddy Hudgens	Steve Singletary
Hank Jester	

Others Attending

Chris Boswell, Lee County Utilities

Gary Coker, Newton

Kreg Freeman, Miller County

Mike McCoy, Dougherty County

Spencer Mueller, Early County

Walt Pierce, Edison

Pete Stephens, Decatur County

Steve Sykes, City of Camilla

Cory Thomas, Colquitt

Steve Brock, Decatur County

Conner Collins, Calhoun County

Mandie Milner, Calhoun County

Steve Golladay, Jones Center

Kier Klepzig, Jones Center

Willie Ware, Damascus City Council

Steven Brantley, Jones Center

Cliff Lewis, GAEPD

Gail Cowie, GAEPD

Jennifer Welte, GAEPD

Chelsea Smith, Jones Center

Cale Cloud, UGA Extension

Rhonda Gordon, Golden Triangle

Julie Shutters, Golden Triangle

George Vellidis, UGA

Rob Weller, GADNR

Steve Simpson, Black and Veatch

Katie Hughes, Black and Veatch

Mark Masters, Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center

Kristin Rowles, Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center