



Meeting Summary

Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Regional Water Council Meeting

Riverfront Resource Center – Albany, GA

December 11, 2017

Welcome, Introductions, Chairman's Discussion

Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Chair Richard Royal welcomed members, thanked everyone for their attendance and asked members and guests to introduce themselves. Chairman Royal noted that the husband of Council member Elaine Mayes had passed away. He noted that Chuck Lingle has resigned from the Council due to health concerns. He asked members to keep Elaine and Chuck in their thoughts and prayers. The Chairman asked the members

to consider the meeting summary from June 20, 2017, for approval. *Following a motion by Vince Falcione and a second by Mike Newberry, the meeting summary from the June 20, 2017 Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Council meeting was approved by consensus.*

Seed Grant Applications Discussion

Kristin then provided an update on two proposed seed grants in the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Regional Water Planning Council area. The first grant proposal is from the Golden Triangle RC&D and is focused on water quality monitoring and Best Management Practice (BMP) implementation in the Chickasawhatchee Creek watershed in Terrell County. Rhonda Gordon (Golden Triangle) gave a brief summary of the proposal. The second grant proposal is from the University of Georgia Stripling Irrigation Research Park focused on irrigation scheduling and efficiency. Calvin Perry (UGA, LFO Council member) gave an overview of the UGA proposal. *The Council agreed to submit letters of support for both seed grant applications by consensus.*

Review of Council Member Survey Results

Next, Kristin reviewed the results of a recently completed Council-member survey (slides available). The survey was conducted as a part of an effort by EPD and the regional water planning contractors to gather input on the regional water planning process. A total of 256 surveys were distributed statewide to water planning council members. Approximately 36% of the surveys were returned. A total of ten surveys were completed by Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Council members. In general, Council members felt that the Plans were being implemented, and a strong majority indicated a solid understanding of the water demand forecasts and resource assessments used in planning. Respondents offered a broad range of recommendations to improve the process with an emphasis on engaging implementing actors and increasing public awareness. Council comments on the survey results included the following:

- The Florida v Georgia litigation seemed to be a barrier to the timing and amount of information provided to the Council;
- The resolution of the litigation will not be the end of conflict over water and agriculture needs to continue to stay engaged;
- Many farmers are not aware that there has been a tremendous amount of work to keep agriculture at the table in water issues;
- A concentrated effort on information and outreach is needed on the agricultural water issues and the work of the Council.
- Development of press releases with quotes and access to local TV shows and PSA slots can help “get the story out.” A number of members suggested that local media outreach should be county-specific.

Outreach Tools for Council Members

Steve Simpson then presented a draft PowerPoint and fact sheet that Council members may use for local education and outreach meetings. Electronic versions of the outreach materials were provided to each Council member via USB drive. Council member comments included the following:

- The presentation has too much material to keep an audience interested. The material can be tailored to individual audiences, and the planning contractor can assist in doing so.
- Public awareness efforts should include engaging local media to spread the word about Council’s work and educate the public regarding issues on water management.

- A short video that members could use for outreach would be really helpful.
- Outreach material should convey a sense of urgency to engage the public. Council members can add their own sense of importance of these issues in their comments in presentations.
- The group discussed that important messages to convey include:
 - Where we are/where we are going in terms of water demand
 - Supreme Court litigation is not decided and litigation risk over water remains
 - What these water issues/risks mean
 - What the plan does to address the water issues/risks

Steve asked the Council members to indicate on a sign-up form whether they would be willing to do local presentations on the work of the Council and the regional water plan. Kristin offered to help Council members in tailoring slides to specific audiences.

Updates from EPD

Dr. Gail Cowie (EPD) provided the Council updates on a number of items on behalf of EPD. Topics discussed included:

- Oral arguments in the Supreme Court case between Florida and Georgia in the ACF will be on January 8, 2018. The arguments are scheduled for one hour with presentations from Florida, Georgia and the United States. A decision from the Court will be issued before the end of the current Court term (June 30).
- There is a specific annual appropriation for the statewide Regional Water Planning process. Funding is used to support Council meetings and contractor support, the seed grant program and additional technical work to support future planning efforts.
- EPD has continued to collect data and perform technical work on the Claiborne Aquifer.
- The EPD Agricultural Permitting Unit has initiated a particular emphasis on compliance related to special conditions on installation of groundwater wells in areas with restrictions on withdrawals.
- Adoption of HR 1198 during the 2017 legislative session required EPD to review rules and regulations related to Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR). A report of the review was provided to the Department of Natural Resources Board of Directors. Specifically, EPD has committed to specific actions related to ASR permitting:
 - Developing a guidance for permitting and compliance
 - Single point of contact in the agency
 - Establishing a project specific roadmap in permitting

- The Golden Triangle RC&D is utilizing 319 funding in the LFO region to develop a nine-point plan to data collection and the implementation of non-point source BMPs in the Aucilla watershed

Report on Implementation Seed Grant on Dynamic VRI

Casey Cox (Flint Soil & Water Conservation District, Council member) gave an update on a seed grant project for regional water plan implementation. The project is focused on water conservation efforts in the Spring Creek watershed (slides available). Conservation measures evaluated included variable-rate irrigation (VRI), soil moisture sensors and irrigation scheduling. Council discussion of the presentation addressed the following:

- The technologies are proven, but additional information is needed on the cost effectiveness of on-the-ground implementation.
- Outfitting a full center pivot with VRI is expensive, but there is some new information on “modular” VRI systems that demonstrates how growers can make more cost-effective use of VRI by retrofitting portions of center pivots.

LUNCH BREAK

Report on Agricultural Water Meter Program

Marjie Dickey (GAEPD) provided the Council an update on the Agricultural Water Meter program and EPD’s focus on metering in the Flint and Suwannee River Basins. She reported that EPD has contracted with the Georgia Rural Water Association to manage a 2017-18 “pilot” project with the goal of installing up to 900 meters in the target watersheds. She also reported that the Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center (GWPPC) at Albany State University is playing a key role in completing the assessments of locations that have been identified as possibly in need of meter installations. Mark Masters (GWPPC) gave the Council a brief overview of the assessment process and the type of information collected on behalf of EPD. Marjie indicated that substantial progress is being made in assessing meter installations and installing meters where needed. She said that the plan is to continue such efforts across the state. Council discussion addressed the following:

- This initiative will begin looking at meters that need repair or replacement in the target area in the new year. The Georgia Forestry Commission notes when they observe that repair or replacement is needed during their annual meter readings (currently on-going).

- A small number of meters will be difficult to address and may not be cost-effective to install, repair, or replace. EPD will determine how to address these. Alternative methods to measure water use might be useful for some locations.
- The administration of the pilot program of meter assessments and installation is being performed by the Georgia Rural Water Association. The GRWA has experience in managing data collection efforts and projects on behalf of EPD.

Presentation by Leesburg Utilities

In the past few years, the Council has invited implementing actors in the region to give presentations to the Council and discuss regional water resource management with the Council. The scheduled speaker from Lee County had to reschedule his presentation, and a substitute speaker was invited to address the Council. Bob Alexander (City Manager, Leesburg, GA) presented an update on several projects completed by the City in recent years. He reported on updates to system infrastructure, installation of smart meters, and the financing vehicles used to support system updates, including programs from the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority and Community Development Block Grants.

Public Comment

Gordon Rogers (Flint Riverkeeper) offered appreciation for the Council's work on completing their 2017 revised Regional Water Plan. He thanked the Council for addressing the water quality issues in the region including those related to the City of Albany combined sewer overflow (CSO). Mr. Rogers also expressed some concern and asked that members investigate the pending rules under consideration by the DNR Board related to water quality permitting. He also reported on efforts in the Upper Flint region by utilities to increase municipal system returns to the Flint River Basin and to discuss other low-flow remediation strategies.

Ryan Thompson (Harvey Drilling Co.) expressed thanks to the Council members for their work on the water issues of the region. He offered that the well-drilling industry is just as dependent on the groundwater resources of the area as farmers. He commented that the drilling industry should have a seat at the table in on-going discussions about water resource management.

Next Steps

Kristin asked Council members about their preferences related to scheduling and agenda topics for the next meeting. Responses indicated that Council members would like to wait until the Florida v. Georgia case is decided by the Supreme Court so that the Council can learn about and discuss the ruling. A Council member asked about the status of the Habitat Conservation Plan project that was undertaken in the region a few years ago. It was noted that the project is now

complete. Chairman Royal said that this approach is still considered to be an important option to consider for this region. Council Chairman Royal thanked members for attending, and the meeting was adjourned.

**Council Members Attending December 11,
2017 Meeting**

Richard Royal, Chair

Jimmy Webb, Vice Chair

John Heath

Connie Hobbs

Vince Falcione

Casey Cox

Mike Newberry

Jimmy Champion

Jerry Lee

Hank Jester

Steve Singletary

Steve Bailey

George McIntosh

Calvin Perry

Huddy Hudgens

Jim Quinn

Phil Long