



### Meeting Summary

#### **Middle Chattahoochee Regional Water Council Meeting**

**Burson Center – Carrollton, Georgia**

**March 26, 2019**

#### **Welcome & Introductions**

Kristin Rowles (Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center) started the meeting by welcoming the Council members and attendees to the meeting. The meeting was designed as a workshop for water systems and local governments in the region, and Kristin asked that the invited participants join the Council members at the table. She asked each person to introduce themselves. Harry Lange, Vice Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and emphasized the importance to the Council of input from stakeholders in the region. It was noted that Chairman Steve Davis was not able to attend due to a death in the family.

Next, Matt Windom, Council member and Executive Director of the Carroll County Water Authority, welcomed the meeting participants to Carroll County. He asked Daniel Jackson, President and CEO of the Carroll County Chamber of Commerce/Carroll Tomorrow, to say a few words about Carroll County and the Burson Center, which is a business incubator and resource center that serves West Georgia.

Kristin Rowles reviewed the meeting agenda. She noted that the meeting includes Council members, water system managers, 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 and the planning contractors for the Council from Black and Veatch 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 start with a special focus on drought management planning,

strategies, and requirements, which are topics of importance to the Council. The latter part of the meeting will expand the focus to regional water planning.

### **Drought Management Requirements**

Steve Simpson (Black and Veatch) presented slides on the requirements in Georgia for drought management. A copy of the presentation is available. The citation to the current state drought management requirements is Georgia Rule 391-3-30. The current requirements were enacted in 2016 and replaced the previous requirements, which addressed outdoor water use. The rule serves to protect the public water supply to ensure that public water systems can meet public health needs during droughts. It includes pre-drought mitigation strategies, indicators and triggers for drought response, and tiers of requirements for drought response based on the severity of drought conditions. It includes provisions for variance requests.

Drought indicators are tracked by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) and include metrics related to the following: precipitation, streamflow, groundwater, reservoir levels, soil moisture, short term weather predictions, U.S. Drought Monitor, and water supply conditions. Each permittee subject to the requirements (public water systems that have permits to withdrawal 100 million gallons per day or more) must develop a drought contingency plan with drought triggers. The systems must notify EPD when a trigger is exceeded. Drought declarations are made by the EPD Director. There are three levels (drought response levels 1, 2, and 3) of increasing severity and increasing levels of response and requirements. Steve distributed handouts about the strategies by which a permittee can comply with requirements and a handout outlining how the regulations affect when various outdoor water uses are allowed.

Discussion related to the presentation included the following:

- The new drought management rule, which Steve presented, are an improvement over the previous rule.
- The rules work well, generally, but some are hard to implement, such as the pool cover strategy.
- Municipalities are in the water business, and they are often driven by their interest in selling water.
  - Steve Simpson noted that the drought management rule includes a drought surcharge that can help maintain revenue levels during drought.
- When will the next drought be? It's pretty wet now. Hard to predict.
  - Christine Voudy (EPD) noted that her agency tracks drought indicators to try to anticipate drought conditions.

- Communication among municipalities occurred when Carroll County applied for a variance in the last drought (2016).
- Can EPD enforce against water systems that do not comply with the drought management requirements?
  - EPD requires self-reporting and largely relies on the water systems to stay in communication with the agency. However, the rules are enforceable.
- The Council includes a recommendation on drought management plans and compliance with the drought rules in its plan:

***Management Practice WS-5: Prepare drought contingency plans that comply with state rules for drought management.***

- Prepare for the inevitability of periodic drought by outlining key metrics defining drought condition triggers, system operating procedures and metrics, water use restrictions, water supply alternatives, and emergency protocol for water supply.
- Water systems with permitted withdrawals are required to prepare drought contingency plans (Ga. Comp. R. & Regs R. 391-3-2-.04(11) and 391-3-6-.07(4)). Those plans should be revised as needed to ensure that they are consistent with the state rules for drought management (Ga. Comp. R. & Regs R. 391-3-30).
- Water providers that are not subject to these requirements (i.e., withdrawals less than 100,000 gallons per day) should adopt similar drought contingency plans that are also aligned with the state rules for drought management.

### **Drought Management Case Studies: Hogansville, Carroll County, & Columbus**

The next part of the program was the discussion of three drought management case studies from the region from Hogansville, Carroll County Water Authority, and Columbus Water Works. First, Kristin showed a short video developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on drought response by Hogansville: <https://vimeo.com/131116097> She asked Joe Vidal, Water Superintendent from Hogansville, to comment on the video. Joe said that Hogansville has replaced all of its surface water pipes and reduced line leaks from 120 to 2. He emphasized the importance of getting the City Council to understand the importance of making an investment in fixing leaks in the water system. He emphasized the importance of leak detection, system auditing, and interconnection with neighboring systems in Hogansville's response to and preparation for drought.

Next, Caleb Cole, Customer Advocacy Manager from Columbus Water Works, presented slides on the utility's drought management plan. A copy of his presentation is available. He explained that Columbus Water Works provides water to Harris and Talbot Counties and to Fort Benning.

Next, Kristin assembled a panel about the case studies including:

- Joe Vidal, Hogansville Water Superintendent
- Caleb Cole, Columbus Water Works
- Matt Windom, Carroll County Water Authority Executive Direction
- Jay Matthews, Georgia Rural Water Association

First, Kristin asked Matt Windom to describe Carroll County Water Authority's drought plan. Matt emphasized the importance of leak detection and source diversification to the Authority's preparation for drought. The county gets 90% of its water supply from surface water and seeks to diversify its water sources. Interconnections are also important: Carroll County Water Authority has 30 interconnections with neighboring systems. Droughts have been more frequent and severe since 1999. As the Authority looks at safe yield for its reservoir and proposed reservoir, these amounts have decreased substantially. Matt said its important to understand the viability of the water supply. The Authority tracks the number of days that they can supply their customers, especially during drought periods.

Kristin asked Jay Matthews to explain the work of the Georgia Rural Water Association. The Association played a major role in helping Hogansville with leak detection and system auditing. The Association provides small water systems with technical assistance and training. They usually work with communities with less than 10,000 residents. They treat water systems as businesses and support them in keeping their plans to function as businesses up-to-date. This includes plans for drought response. Another area of focus for their work is meter calibration. They help water systems in calibrating their production meters and meters for large customers to support them in tracking water production and use.

Kristin moderated a discussion by the panel in response to Q&A from the group. The following is a summary of the discussion:

- Columbus Water Works has an interconnection under the river with Phenix City, AL for emergencies. A Council member asked how this agreement works. It was noted that it is probably under the purview of the GA Department of Community Affairs.
- What is a creek walk? We walk a creek looking for signs of infiltration, pipes, effluent, and biota concerns.
- Leak detection is really important. Most leaks are not large, but some can be quite substantial. The age and material of a pipe affect the number of leaks.

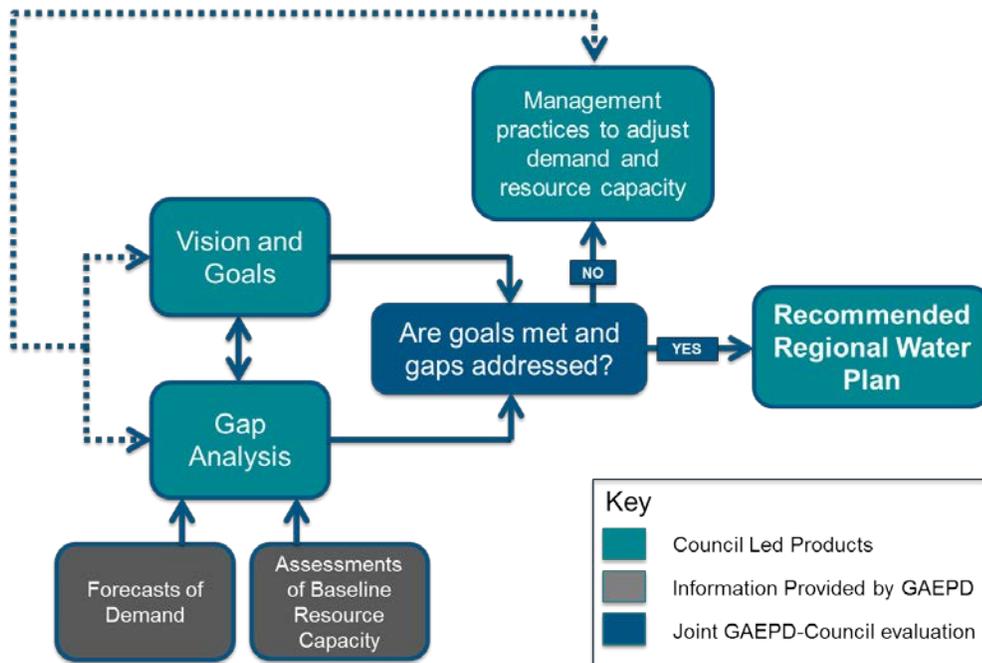
- Acoustic monitoring is used to identify leaks, but this approach can be less effective where there are PVC distribution lines. In these areas, other techniques are used instead.
- Caleb Cole said an additional benefit of leak detection is that they have people on the ground going through the distribution system on a regular basis, and they catch other issues, too. He said that their the leak detection team is out every week.
- Would a 50,000 gallons per day leak be easy for find? A utility can identify that kind of leak by monitoring water pressure in the system. Jay Matthews said that some leaks can be hard to find; it took them a week to find a 500 gallon per minute leak because it was in the woods. Finding leaks depends on the location of the leak and the circumstances of the system.
- Hogansville is a community of 3100 people. Drought planning was really important to them. Brining unaccounted-for water under better control was a big part of the improvements they have made to prepare for drought. Water audits can also be a big help to smaller systems.
- Columbus Water Works has a communications plan for drought. This is a good thing for water systems to have ready.
- Interconnections and communications with neighboring water systems are also very important for drought planning and response.
- The Regional Water Plan recommends that water systems that are not required to develop a drought management plan under the state requirements should still engage in drought management planning (see Management Practice above). The panel members noted the importance of preparing smaller communities for drought through system audits and planning.
- What recommendations does the panel have to make it easier to comply with the rule? Caleb Cole stated the preparing a communication plan has been beneficial for Columbus. Matt Windom stressed the importance of interconnections. Joe Vidal emphasized communication.
- The panel ended its discussion with an emphasis on the importance of water to communities and the need to educate public officials and the general public about the value of water.
- Kristin thanked the panel members for sharing their perspectives.

### **Regional Water Planning in the Middle Chattahoochee**

Kristin presented slides to describe the regional water council and explain the process of regional water planning. A copy of her presentation is available. 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 Middle Chattahoochee region includes 11 counties: Carroll, Chattahoochee, Clay, Haralson, Harris, Heard, Muscogee, Quitman, Randolph, Stewart, and Troup. The region includes parts of the Chattahoochee, Flint, Tallapoosa, and Little Tallapoosa 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.



Kristin asked Christine Voudy (EPD) to explain how the regional water plans are used by the state. Christine described EPD’s permitting processes which consider the regional water plans in permitting decisions. It was also noted that the plans are considered by the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) in decisions about loans for water projects.

### **LUNCH BREAK**

#### **Funding Sources for Water Projects**

Christine Voudy (EPD) distributed handouts about sources of state funding for water projects. One sources 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 Columbus Water Works, the Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center, and the River Valley Regional Commission. Laura Schneider of the River Valley Regional Commission briefly commented on the Commission’s projects in the region supported by the Seed Grant program and the 319 grant program. Kristin encouraged attendees to consider potential projects for the Seed Grant program.

#### **Regional Water Plan Perspectives and Implementation**

Kristin split the group into two smaller discussion groups to be led by Kristin and Steve Simpson. The purpose of the small group discussions was to allow for time to get know each other and to provide Council members with ideas and considerations for the next round of regional water planning. Each group discussed the following questions:

- Council Members: What is most important to you in the regional water plan?
- Public water system and local government participants: What challenges do you face in planning for and responding to drought? Do you have suggestions for the regional water plan?
- Grantees: Do you have recommendations to the Council based on what you learned through your project(s) in the region?

#### **Wrap-Up on Drought Management and Looking Ahead to the Next Planning Cycle**

When the groups reconvened, the group moderators summarized the small group discussions as follows:

- Alternative water sources should be considered to provide supply during drought, especially for nonpotable uses.
- Some water quality problems in the region originate upstream (e.g., bacteria from metro Atlanta). Need to address upstream sources.
- Forestry has improved implementation of BMPs in recent years.

- Water security in the region is a continuing concern as a result of the interstate litigation.
- Water improvements for small water system in the region are costly, and funding can be difficult to attain.
- New ACF Operations Manual may result in more water stored in the region; will wait and see what the outcome looks like.
- ACF Stakeholders Sustainable Water Management Plan should be considered.
- When water levels are low, the costs of water treatment are high.
- Low water levels hurt the regional economy.
- Dredging is needed to maintain navigation in the Lower ACF.
- Management of aquatic weeds in W.F. George and West Point Reservoirs is controversial. Some want them, some don't.
- Septic tanks are common in rural areas like much of this region. Are they fully consumptive? Need better information.

### **Georgia Environmental Protection Division Updates**

Christine Voudy 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. More information is available on the Special Master docket sheet at <https://www.ca10.uscourts.gov/special-master-142>

### **Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

### **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. She asked participants to let her know if they would like to have Council members and planning contractors present the regional water plan to a particular audience in the region. Kristin said that she would be happy to help make arrangements to support and expand communications and outreach in the region. She also asked participants to think about ideas for grant projects and to get in touch with her if they would like to seek input or support from the Council on project proposals. The Council would like to see more proposals from the region that will support the implementation of the regional water plan. Harry Lange,

Vice Chair, thanked everyone for their participation and contributions. He noted the importance of the input received. Kristin invited participants to attend future Council meetings. The meeting was adjourned.

**Council Members Attending March 26, 2019 Meeting**

Harry Lange, Vice Chair

Robie York

James Emery

Matt Windom

Alan Bell

**Others Attending**

Gary Bullock, Bowdon

Joe Vidal, Hogansville

Robert Gamble, Whitesburg

Jay Matthews, Georgia Rural Water Association

Frances Macy, Carroll County Water Authority

Christine Voudy, EPD

Bryant Snyder, Heard County Water Authority

Johanna Smith, EPD

Mike Criddle, West Point

Steve Simpson, Black and Veatch

Doug Griffin, Carroll County Water Authority

Katie Hughes, Black and Veatch

Terry Pike, LaGrange

Paul McDaniel, GA Forestry Commission

Jimmy Adams

Chris Manganiello, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper

Tom Rohser

Brent Hess, GA DNR

Billy Turner

Kristin Rowles, Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center

Caleb Cole, Columbus Water Works

Laura Schneider, River Valley Regional Commission

Daniel Jackson, Carroll County Chamber of Commerce/Carroll Tomorrow