



## Meeting Summary

### Upper Flint Regional Water Council Meeting

Flint Energies – Reynolds, Georgia

March 28, 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. Donald Chase, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and emphasized the importance to the Council of input from stakeholders in the region. Chairman Chase also introduced Johanna Smith, the new Council liaison from Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD).

Next, Bob Ray, President and CEO of Flint Energies, welcomed the meeting participants to the headquarters of Flint Energies. He emphasized that Flint Energies is in the business of improving quality of life in the region, as is the Council. He thanked the Council for its work.

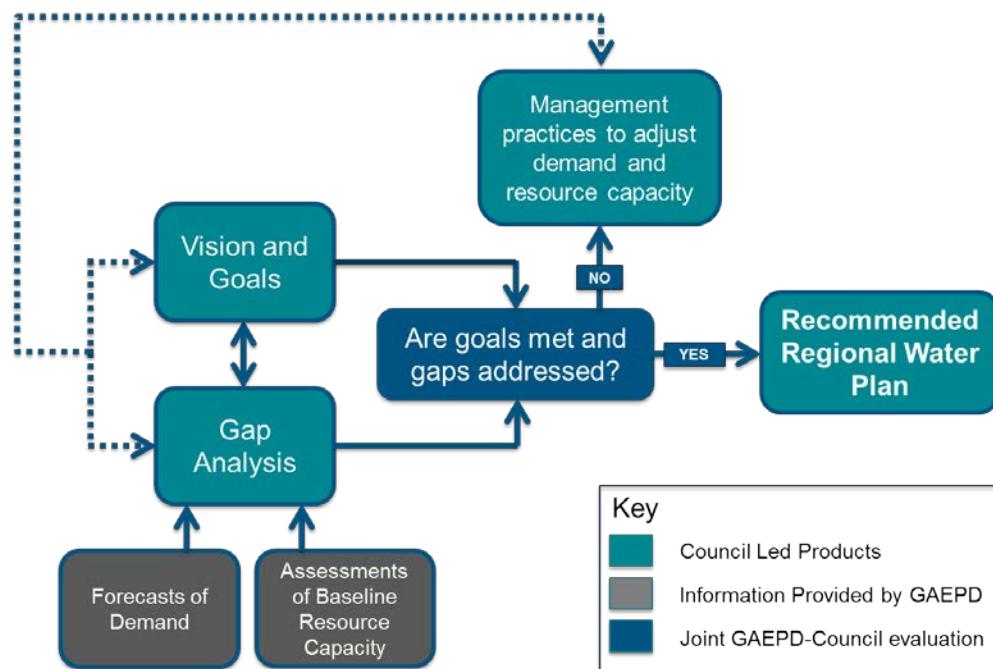
Kristin Rowles reviewed the meeting agenda. She noted that the meeting includes Council members, water system managers, local government officials, and grantees that are implementing projects to support regional water plan implementation. Also present were representatives of EPD and the planning contractors 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 foster understanding and communication about the regional water plan and includes a focus on drought management planning, strategies, and requirements, which are topics of importance to the Council.

### **Regional Water Planning in the Upper Flint**

Kristin presented slides to describe the regional water council and explain the process of regional water planning. A copy of the 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 Upper Flint region includes 13 counties: Spalding, Pike, Meriwether, Upson, Talbot, Taylor, Marion, Schley, Macon, Webster, Sumter, Dooly, and Crisp. The region includes parts of the Flint, Chattahoochee, Ocmulgee, 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.



Kristin asked some Council members to comment on their experience in regional water planning. A Council member commented that the planning process was “eye-opening” about the importance of managing water resources in the region and also offered that operating by consensus was important for the Council’s success. Another member pointed out that the Council’s work has been critical outside this region, including as part of the conflict over water resources in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint system. Another member said that the average person does not recognize the importance of water planning because as long as water is available, people do not notice it.

The following is a summary of discussion of the presentation:

- In response to a question, Kristin said that the decline in projected municipal water use for the region is based largely on projected population decline region-wide.
- A member asked for clarification on the length and process for Council appointments. Council appointments are for three years or until the seat is re-appointed. Several seats are currently open for new appointments.
- A member suggested that the Council has a responsibility to become “water ambassadors” for educating the general public, and particularly young people, on the importance of water planning.
- An attendee offered the importance of maintaining shoal bass habitat in the Flint River.

### **EPD & Regional Water Planning**

Kristin asked Johanna Smith (EPD) to explain how the regional water plans are used by the state. Johanna 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 for grants and loans for water projects.

Next, Johanna 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>

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

Kristin split the group into smaller discussion groups led by Kristin, Mark Masters (GWPPC), and Steve Simpson (Black and Veatch). 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?

### **Summary of Small Group Discussions**

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

- Water management practices should be in concert with or support local objectives.
- Equitable access to water and safe drinking water are top priorities. Water quality concerns are also important. This region is aging and experiencing population loss.
- The Council needs to do more education and outreach to the general public about their work and the importance of water management.
- Agricultural metering and conservation implementation should remain a high priority.
- The Council should take advantage of assessment data and information collected by entities that may inform resource assessments or target resources and BMP implementation (e.g., information collected by conservation districts or regional commissions on erosion activities).
- Smaller public water systems face financial challenges in upgrading and maintaining their water and wastewater systems (e.g., Pinehurst water system, Vienna wastewater treatment sprayfields, Reynolds storage tanks, addressing infiltration, upgrading water meters, addressing asbestos-concrete lines). New requirements can be very costly for small towns. Applying for grants takes time.
- Educate children about water. They will educate their parents.
- Acidic water can cause issues for treatment equipment.
- Addressing infiltration and creating interconnections should be a priority.
- This region has lots of small water and wastewater systems. Consider regional service delivery approaches.

- Conservation is important to agriculture. Seed grants have supported projects focused on agricultural water efficiency. One farmer said that he employs one person to fix leaks every day.
- Many permits have excess capacity. Is this meaningful? Can it be transferred to other systems to help attract businesses to the region?
- More research is needed to understand the potential impacts of climate change on water resources in the region.

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.

### **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 2015 and replaced 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 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 (water withdrawals of 100,000 gallons per day or more) must develop a drought contingency plan with drought triggers. The systems must notify EPD when a drought trigger is exceeded. Drought declarations are made by EPD. There are three levels (1, 2, 3) of increasing severity and increasing levels of response and requirements. Steve distributed a handout with the response strategies menu and a summary of when various outdoor water uses are allowed.

### **LUNCH BREAK**

### **Drought Management Case Studies: Hogansville & Griffin**

The next part of the program was the discussion of two drought management case studies from Hogansville and Griffin. Although Hogansville is in the Middle Chattahoochee water planning region, its drought response case study is highly relevant for small communities in this region, and it is located close to this region. Kristin showed a short video developed by the US Environmental Protection Agency on drought response by Hogansville:

<https://vimeo.com/131116097> Next, Kristin assembled a panel for the case studies discussion including:

- Brant Keller, Griffin Public Works and Utilities
- Jay Matthews, Georgia Rural Water Association

She asked Brant Keller to describe Griffin's drought management plan and drought response in recent severe drought periods. Dr. Keller explained what the City has learned from each of the recent droughts that has helped them improve their response to later droughts. He said that in 2002, Griffin was only 30 days away from having no water available. The City modified its drought response plan in 2011. The City hired an education specialist for water in 2004 and implemented conservation rates in 2007. In 2008, Griffin updated its prediction model. He mentioned that Griffin is currently using remote sensing to find water leaks in their distribution system. It identifies leaks based on chlorine and fluoride. It is costly to use (minimum \$20,000), but the benefits can be substantial.

Next, Kristin asked Jay Matthews from the Georgia Rural Water Association to comment on the Hogansville video. 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:

- The plan revisions should include an emphasis on water education; educating the general public about the true cost of water and what it takes to get water to their tap.
- An attendee offered that source water protection should be emphasized.
- It is difficult to get the public interested in learning about water and water systems. They are not interested as long as there is not a problem.

Kristin thanked the panel members for sharing their perspectives.

### **Agricultural Water Use and Efficiency**

Mark Masters (GWPPC) presented slides about agricultural water use in the region. His slides are available. 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 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:

- One Council member who is a farmer has an employee dedicated to leak detection; he said it is really important to farmers to use water efficiently.
- Dairy farms account for some of the continued use of high-pressure nozzles; it is difficult for them to go to low pressure.
- The cost of soil moisture sensors is coming down; this can help us to grow more crop with less water.
- Farmers work to control runoff; cover crop usage and no-till are important for this.
- A seed grant project at Stripling Irrigation Research Park is working in the Upper Flint and Lower Flint-Ochlockonee regions to educate county agents on agricultural water efficiency technology and encourage them to share those technologies with farmers in their region.
- Consider supporting more funding for research on agricultural water efficiency.
- The state has invested from its limited resources on getting more and better data on agricultural water use; they made getting that data a priority.
- At the beginning of the planning process, agricultural water meters were not widespread. Now they are. Getting to 100% installation will be tough; every meter is different. Georgia has a good program that can be considered a model for agricultural water management.

### **Plan Implementation and Funding Sources for Water Projects**

Johanna Smith (EPD) 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 Stripling Irrigation Research Park, the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District, and the River Valley Regional Commission. Laura Schneider of the River Valley Regional Commission briefly commented on the Commission's projects in and near the region supported by the Seed Grant program and the 319 grant program. Calvin Perry commented on the Stripling Irrigation Research Park's seed grant project for agricultural

water efficiency earlier in the program. Brant Keller from Griffin shared guides with the group that the City developed to educate their staff and others about the proper maintenance of stormwater BMPs. Griffin has implemented many 319 grants. Kristin encouraged attendees to consider potential projects for the Seed Grant and 319 grant programs. She noted that such projects can support implementation of the regional water plan.

### **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 for suggestions for outreach opportunities in the region. Council members suggested getting community leaders “out in the field” to better understand water management concerns in the region.

### **Public Comment**

Ben Emanuel (American Rivers) reported on their completion of a status report on the work of the Upper Flint River Working Group: Ensuring Water Security for People and Nature. The Report is available online at <https://www.americanrivers.org/conservation-resource/the-upper-flint-river-working-group-ensuring-water-security-for-people-and-nature/> Ben spoke to the Council about the Working Group at the last Council meeting. Ben had hard copies of the report available for distribution.

Mark Masters (GWPPC) informed the Council of a project from the Institute for Georgia Environmental Leadership (IGEL) aimed at general water education for community leaders. The sessions will be held around the state starting in May 2019. He offered that much of the curriculum is based on the data and planning activities of the Water Councils and asked them for suggestions on potential attendees.

### **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. Donald Chase, 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 28, 2019 Meeting**

Donald Chase, Chair	Brant Keller
Gene Brunson	Buddy Leger
Michael Bowens	Lamar Perlis
Beth English	Larry Smith
Terrell Hudson	Randall Starling
Jack Holbrook	

**Others Attending**

Bruce Hill, Oglethorpe	Laura Schneider, River Valley Regional Commission
Billy Martin, Oglethorpe	Calvin Perry, UGA Stripling Irrigation Park
Valery Davis, Marshallville	Ben Emmanuel, American Rivers
Jim Littlefield, Sumter County	Jay Matthews, Georgia Rural Water Association
Connie Christmas, Pinehurst	Jennifer Welte, EPD
Jessie Rees, Leslie	Johanna Smith, EPD
Brandon Baker, GA DNR	Steve Simpson, Black and Veatch
Jim Copland, Montezuma	Katie Hughes, Black and Veatch
Scott Jones, Reynolds	Mark Masters, Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center
Nathan Jordan, Vienna	Kristin Rowles, Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center
Garrett Nordan, Upson County	
Mike Roper, GA Power	
Walter Turner, Reynolds	
Regina McDuffie, Macon County	