

# **Georgia Department of Natural Resources**

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To: Coosa-North Georgia Water Planning Council  
From: Becky Champion, Assistant Branch Chief, GA EPD  
Rick Brownlow, CH2M HILL  
Subject: Meeting Summary: Council Meeting 11 on December 7, 2011

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## **Welcome, Meeting Overview and Announcements**

John Bennett gave the introductions and Mike Jones, Pickens County Commissioner, welcomed the council to Jasper and Pickens County. In honor of Pearl Harbor Day, Ken Beasley, told a brief story about where he was when the announcement came that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Bennett noted that the purpose of the meeting today was to wrap up the planning process and discuss how the council may move forward in the future. In addition, he mentioned a potential rock quarry site for a reservoir that may provide some water supply storage.

Rick Brownlow reviewed the agenda for the meeting and introduced Mark Marlowe to present an overview of the North West Georgia Regional Water Resources Partnership.

## **Presentation by Northwest Georgia Regional Water Resources Partnership**

Mr. Marlowe noted that the partnership was formed in 2001 at a time when there were a number of new regulatory activities that multiple local governments were faced with. He explained that it is a voluntary organization that only requires contribution of minimal dues. He noted that they have a number of professional folks that participate so they don't have to hire a lot of outside expertise. The area is essentially based around the Coosa River Basin. There are two types of memberships: full and associate. The associate membership does not have voting rights in the partnership. There is a 12 member executive committee that essentially governs the organization. The NWGA Regional Commission has been directly involved and has helped with contracts for outside services and grants. They also manage the bank account and funds for the partnership.

One of the primary focuses of the partnership is tracking and advocacy for water related regulations and legislation. They have done a lot of public education on water issues in the region that has benefited all the utilities in the region. The Partnership has brought in funding from the USACE, DCA, and EPD. He noted that their focus has been on planning activities. He also explained that members also tried to get legislation to provide additional federal funding for water projects but they have been unsuccessful to date.

Annual dues for a full membership are \$1500 and the associate member dues are \$500.

The biggest project that they have implemented has been a regional watershed assessment. This assessment has been submitted to EPA and they are working on finalizing the document. Also, they have recently selected a contractor to help them prepare a watershed protection plan.

David Ashburn indicated that one of the reasons he has participated in the partnership is the savings they have received from the combined studies. He estimated that the county has saved \$200,000 through the partnership and the economies of scale realized by working together.

Most recently, the partnership has been focused on the nutrient issues in the Coosa watershed and the implications on utilities. He indicated that the implications for utilities would be millions of dollars in treatment costs. The partnership is going to be implementing a water quality trading study using an EPA 319 grant.

Mr. Marlowe indicated that the Partnership does not currently include the all the counties in the water planning region. Dawson, Union, Habersham, White, Towns and Lumpkin counties in the east portion of the region are not currently included.

The group asked what sort of public education activities have been used. Mr. Marlowe noted that they held a workshop on drought for public officials and the public this year. David Ashburn noted that now that the RWP is done the subcommittee on public education could support the specific recommendations in the plan. Lee Mulkey noted that the particular issues and physics of the eastern portion of the CNG are somewhat different from the western portion. Therefore, the expertise of the western utilities may not be completely up to speed on the eastern. Mr. Marlowe noted that he would hope that the professionals from the eastern portion of the region would begin to participate and bring their expertise. Willard Ferguson noted that he had participated in a national integrated system (NIS/EIS) on drought and they were talking about a lot of the same topics. The participants included the Corps and a number of agencies.

Mike Berg noted that the additional local governments will have a variety of stormwater and other water quality issues. Mr. Marlowe indicated that the partnership has been addressing some of the similar issues and will as part of the watershed protection plan they are working on now. Don Cope reminded the council that the original recommendation of the council was to have the two Regional Commissions provide the primary support and the partnership could be used to provide the technical support. Jerry Jennings also noted that the eastern counties could go along with the Metro District as an option. Don suggested that the counties would be better served as a unified group. Adam Hazell noted that the regional commissions have discussed this and the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission has talked with their counties about this and that the economies of scale are clear. He has also talked with other regional commissions about the potential for this approach to be used for other councils. The regional commissions are willing to be flexible and work with any recommended organization to help balance the influence the Metro North Georgia District. Brook Anderson wanted to remind the council that the state created the map of the water planning region and the counties are now tied together. He also indicated that there have been few utilities involved with the planning effort to date and we'll need more participation for successful implementation. Mr. Mulkey summarized that he agrees with approach for a unified implementation strategy, but, how do we convince the other elected officials that we should move in this direction.

Mr. Bennett noted Bartow and Paulding are in the partnership but not the water planning council. He suggested that by involving the regional commissions we can get these other counties

engaged in the implementation process. Mr. Marlowe noted that Bartow has been a member of the partnership. Mr. Bennett said that it would be good to include Cherokee county, if possible, due to their influence on water in the basin.

### **Discussion with GA EPD on plan implementation goals and objectives**

Becky Champion provided a summary noting that Allen Barnes has signed letters approving all the regional plans and that he is leaving EPD. Jud Turner has been nominated for the director role and still has to be approved by the DNR board. He has been engaged in the water wars legal issues. She indicated that more and more utilities are looking at quarries for water supply storage. Floyd County has looked at a specific location. Ms. Champion noted that there are technical issues with some of these sites because there can be sink holes formed from the lowering of water levels.

Regarding implementation, there are only a few “Musts” regarding implementation in the original comprehensive water plan. The first is related to EPD permitting and the second is GEFA grant approvals – when the implementation with the plans will be reviewed. Internally, EPD has reviewed all the plans and tried to find the commonalities in management practices. They have categorized the major recommendations by RWP and prepared a one page summary document for internal purposes. It’s unlikely that EPD will send out the documents until the new director is approved in January. She indicated that EPD has not finalized the implementation requirements but are much further along than last time the council met.

Ms. Champion also mentioned that they had recently attended a grant writing seminar for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The meeting was provided by Southern Company, NACO, and EPA. She handed out some fliers on the program and encouraged the council members to look into this, if interested. Lastly, she noted that the 319 grant funding has been approved for the council and the approval letter has been sent by EPD.

Tim Bowden indicated that he thought the council would continue to participate in implementation and was concerned about putting all the responsibilities in the regional commissions. Mr. Bennett indicated that the recommendation would be that the regional commissions support implementation but the council continues to meet to evaluate implementation. He did not envision that the state would allow all the councils to take different directions. Ms. Champion noted that according to the original state wide plan the council will continue to exist and will develop plan updates every five years.

### **Northwest Georgia and Georgia Mountains Regional Commission planning support**

David Ashburn thanked EPD for supporting the council and allowing them to develop their OWN plan. He reviewed the letter that was prepared that summarizes the recommended approach for moving forward. There are two letters – one is to the regional commissions asking them to vote to accept the role of supporting implementation. He noted that the council doesn’t have money or authority to implement many of the recommendations. The letter asks them to vote on 1) can they take the role of council and 2) if no on #1, will you help initiate the plans through your existing regional commission activities. The second letter is to EPD indicating that this is the approach the water planning council would like to take to implement the plan. Then the council members can go to their state legislators to get support and potential funding. The goal is to get the commissions to vote.

Mike Berg indicated that the committee had originally asked about funding mechanisms. David Ashburn noted that the regional commissions could look at additional local funds. Adam Hazell indicated that they have discussed this topic and the tabled for now until we find out if the state is going to provide any funding. The goal was to try to get state funding to support the regional commissions (and maybe support implementation for all the councils). Ms. Champion noted that the existing law setting up the water plan does not allow the regional commissions to be the councils. Mr. Ashburn reminded the council that we recommended that in the plan and we recognize that it may not be accepted. Thus, we asked them to vote on item #2 regarding implementation support regardless. Irwin Bagwell said that the council should not go away. David Ashburn noted that we voted to recommend that in the plan, however, unless the state law is changed the council will continue to exist. Don Cope suggested that we modify the letter to indicate that the state needs to take a leadership role on how councils will be implemented in the future. John Bennett suggested that we indicate the council is willing to continue but we need guidance. Mark Marlowe noted that the main reason for this approach is to find an entity that can fund the continued implementation of the council's work.

Jerry Jennings suggested that we modify the third paragraph to indicate that the regional commissions take over the "administrative role" of the council. Mr. Cope recommended that we indicate in the letter that the council strongly encourage the state to take an active role in implementation support. The council voted without objection to send the letters to the appropriate parties.

### **Elected Official and Public Comments**

Todd Edwards from ACCG thanked the group for their efforts and gave a brief legislative update on water issues.

### **Wrap Up/Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Coosa – North Georgia Water Planning Council, December 7, 2011 CM#11

Members Present

1. David Ashburn
2. Irwin Bagwell
3. Kenneth Beasley
4. John Bennett
5. Mike Berg
6. Tim Bowden
7. Keith Coffey (alternate)
8. Don Cope
9. Jerry Crawford (on behalf of Kelly Cornwell)
10. Jerry Jennings
11. Haynes Johnson (alternate)
12. Anne Kaiser
13. Sherry Loudermilk
14. Tim Mercier
15. Lee Mulkey (on behalf of Gerald Dunham)

16. Tom O'Bryant
17. Sam Payne
18. Frank Riley

Members Not Present:

1. Doug Anderton
2. Charlie Bethel
3. Katie Dempsey (ex officio)
4. Pat Gober
5. Stephen Gray
6. Dick Martin
7. Lamar Paris
8. Todd Pealock
9. Chip Pearson (ex officio)
10. David Pennington
11. Jimmy Petty
12. David Westmoreland

GA Environmental Protection Division

1. Becky Champion, Assistant Branch Chief for Coosa-Tallapoosa-Tennessee Basins
2. Michelle Vincent

CH2M HILL

1. Doug Baughman
2. Rick Brownlow