

To: Suwannee – Satilla Regional Water Council

From: Leigh Elkins, Carl Vinson Institute of Government

Re: November 6th Meeting Summary

Date: November 15, 2013

The Suwannee – Satilla Regional Water Council convened for the 12<sup>th</sup> time on Wednesday, November 6, 2013, at the UGA Tifton Campus Conference Center. The primary objectives of the meeting were to: elect a new chairman; review activities in the region since the council was last convened; define the activities of the council over the next nine months; and discuss and determine success stories to highlight in the Regional Assessment of Implementation Status. The following is a summary of the meeting.

Chairman Darvin Eason called the meeting to order and thanked those in attendance for being there. He introduced the Council's new contractor and invited guests to introduce themselves. The council reviewed operating procedures that had been determined when the council first convened in 2009.

Chairman Eason then expressed his desire to continue to serve on the Council but not in the capacity of chairman. Vice Chairman Grady Thompson was asked, and he expressed that he would be happy to continue as Vice Chairman but was not interested in serving as Chair. Written nominations were made, and served as votes, and Scott Downing was elected Chair, with Grady Thompson as Vice Chair.

The Council then discussed EPD activities in the region, and in general since the council last met. Cliff Lewis, Georgia EPD, discussed how EPD is working through the specifics of how the plans are used, but noted that for permitting decisions, they are referred to, but the specifics are not in place. EPD is working through that, relying on an incremental approach to ensure that sound decisions are made. Lewis spoke specifically about the agricultural permitting program and the use of regional plans in decision-making (337 new withdrawal permits for agriculture and 3 for municipal use have been issued since the plan was adopted). Many of the conservation considerations put forward in the Suwannee – Satilla plan are now standard, and the menu of options that this council recommended are being used. There is also work being done across program areas (pollution and land application systems specifically) to determine if there are better options to improve flows. A question was raised about the "water wars" and its impact on this region. Though the lawsuit isn't about this basin, there does need to be an awareness and attention should be paid to ensure that good parameters for how this district works with Florida are relied upon.

Changes in EPD leadership since 2009 were also discussed: a new director, Jud Turner and a new branch chief for watershed protection, Jac Capp, are in place, and a number of other retirements have occurred. And though the economic recovery is continuing, budget cuts have impact EPD and other state agencies since the adoption of the plan. The legislature has made a sound investment in this regional assessment status work as council's look towards the next water planning horizon which will likely be spring 2015 through fall 2016. As before, EPD and contractors will work closely with the councils to revise and update plans as needed. In addition, it was noted that more than \$43 million in GEFA loans are being used in the region for a variety of water-related projects.

A discussion of the Regional Assessment of Implementation Status began with a brief presentation about what the Assessment is and what it isn't, as outlined in the Guidance prepared by EPD. The following information was presented to the Council:

- **Purpose of the report:** to highlight the most significant regional water plan implementation successes and activities underway in the region.
- **It will include:** a discussion of the connection between the described implementation activities, and the vision, goals, practices, and recommendations in the plan; and notable opportunities for near-term actions to further plan implementation.
- **It will not** provide for a systematic assessment of benchmarks, management practice implementation, and barriers to implementation as those will be considered in the 5 year review and revision.

How will the report be used by the Council?

- To better understand and develop role as a bridge to the implementing actors
- As input and a starting point for Council review and revision of the plan
- During the 5 year review, as a tool to assess the need for revision of the plan and to identify potential changes to management practices and other parts of the plan

How will the report be used by EPD and other agencies?

- To further inform alignment of state resources in the region.

How will the report be used by implementing actors?

- To assist in the identification, prioritization, and undertaking of local and regional water management practice implementation activities.

What's in the report?

- Executive Summary – to describe purpose and content, and include a map (no more than 2 pages)
- Implementation Action Categories – three to five
  1. Water Demand Management (must include)
  2. Water Supply
  3. Wastewater
  4. Water Quality
  5. Stormwater – including non-point source management
  6. Data and information needs

## What's in the report?

- Summary of regional implementation activities:
  1. Activities that implement priority plan actions or practices;
  2. Any projects funded by the Governor's Water Supply Program or Section 319 funds;
  3. Any regional water plan seed grant projects.
- Other activities that should be discussed/included:
  1. Council outreach and implementation actions;
  2. Activities to address resource gaps;
  3. Activities for which EPD water permits were issued;
  4. Activities for which federal, state, or private sector grants or loans were received;
  5. Activities for which local funds were raised and expended

Because the Regional Assessment of Implementation Status should also include how the successes in the region relate to the vision and goals of the council, those were presented for review:

### Vision:

The Vision of the Suwannee-Satilla Regional Council is to manage water resources in a sustainable manner under Georgia's regulated riparian and regulated reasonable use laws to support the state's and region's economy, to protect public health and natural resources, and to enhance the quality of life for all citizens; while preserving the property rights of Georgia's landowners, and in consideration of the need to enhance resource augmentation and efficiency opportunities.

### Goals:

1. Manage and develop water resources to sustainably and reliably meet domestic, commercial, industrial water needs, and agricultural water needs including all agricultural sectors (this includes the agro forestry economy of the region).
2. Manage ground and surface water to encourage sustainable economic and population growth in the region.
3. Manage the region's and state's water resources in a manner that preserves and protects private property rights.
4. Ensure an adequate water supply of suitable quality to meet current and future human needs, while protecting environmental resources.
5. Identify opportunities to optimize existing and future supplies, and water and wastewater infrastructure.
6. Promote efficient use and management of surface and groundwater resources to allow for sufficient supplies for current and future generations.

7. Protect and manage surface and groundwater recharge areas to ensure sufficient long-term water supplies for the region.
8. Protect, maintain, and where appropriate and practicable, identify opportunities to enhance water quality and river base flows.
9. Protect and maintain regional water-dependent recreational opportunities.
10. Identify opportunities to manage stormwater to improve water quantity and quality.
11. Identify and implement cost effective water management strategies.
12. Seek to provide economically and affordable power and water resource service to all citizens of the region.
13. Identify and implement actions to better measure and share water use data and information.

The Council was also presented with a brief summary of their plan that can be found in the EPD document: Georgia's Water Future in Focus: Highlights of the Regional Water Planning 2009 – 2011.

<p>In 2005, 27% of the water used in this region came from surface water and 73% from groundwater. The 2010 forecast showed water use in the following sectors: 0% for energy; 19% for municipal users; 6% for industry; and 75% for agriculture.</p> <p>The Suwannee-Satilla plan identifies 76 management practices to address current and future shortfalls and needs. The plan also provides specific recommendations to the State to support successful implementation.</p>	<p><b>Water Conservation</b> Implementation of Water Stewardship Act; evaluate practices from the Water Conservation Implementation Plan; promote water conservation and education programs.</p> <p><b>Water Supply</b> Consider low-flow conditions in future surface water permitting; provide dry-year pond releases; undertake sustainable groundwater development; increase wastewater return increases; explore interbasin transfers.</p> <p><b>Wastewater and Water Quality</b> Relocate wastewater discharge locations; enhance wastewater treatment; increase permitted wastewater capacity; implement non-point source practices for appropriate sectors or land uses (agriculture, urban, forestry, rural); link nutrient loading to current land use.</p> <p><b>Information Needs</b> Refine agricultural consumption data; collect water quality data from all water use sectors; research groundwater sustainability and aquifer potential to address shortfalls; improve data quality and analysis capabilities; irrigation efficiency education and research</p> <p><b>Recommendations to State</b> Focus on education, incentives, collaboration, cooperation, and enabling and supporting plan implementers. Institutionalize water planning. Focus funding and permitting assistance on projects and programs for areas with shortfalls.</p>
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After reviewing the intention of the Assessment and the vision, goals, and plan in brief, the Council discussed the tasks necessary to move forward and the deadlines associated with the work to be done:

**Tasks:**

- Identify projects/actions in the region that support implementation actions (whether intentionally or unintentionally)
- Determine categories that are best supported within the region
- Prepare initial discussion draft for EPD (due 12/2/13)
  - Should include categories to be addressed and a sentence or two describing the action
- Prepare comprehensive review draft for Council and EPD (by 4/01/14)
- Final report to Council and EPD (by 6/15/14)

Chairman Eason asked Angela Bray of the Southern Georgia Regional Commission and Emily Davenport, Stormwater Superintendent for the City of Valdosta, to talk about some of their projects that would be potential success stories to include in the Regional Assessment. Ms. Bray highlighted several 319 projects: one that will conclude in December in Waycross, and two proposals that are currently pending a funding decision. She will provide the contractor with further descriptions for inclusion. Ms. Davenport highlighted several efforts including moving a wastewater treatment plant that has flooded in the past (SPLOST funding for this passed on 11/5/13); and a flood risk management study that is being done.

The Council also had a conversation about agricultural metering, and where the state stands in terms of metering agricultural users, how that information is collected and used, and who is collecting it and how. Luke Crosson talked about the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission's work in this area, and the challenges faced in both metering (cost) and reading those meters (staff) when financial resources are limited. Carlos Herd, Suwannee River Water Management District of Florida, shared what his water district is doing to measure agricultural water use through an automated system for the purposes of determining quantity used. He offered to show and share his Georgia counterparts how it is being done and discuss adaptation for use in Georgia.

Following this conversation, the council determined that success stories that should be included in the Regional Assessment of Implementation Status include efforts that are addressing water quality; data needs; stormwater; water demand, particularly in agriculture, primarily focused on Waycross (319 grant), Valdosta (data, water quality, stormwater), Coffee County (319 grant pending), Tift, Berrien, and Cook counties (319 grant pending); and the Corps of Engineers' Silver Jackets program that will work to address flooding from Tifton to Valdosta and beyond.

Before adjourning the meeting, Chairman Eason asked if there was any public comment. Al Browning, encouraged the Council to remember the importance of education and outreach to help folks understand the importance of data about water quality. Carlos Herd thanked the Council for letting him come as a representative of the Suwannee Water Management District in Florida and wants to work cooperatively for the benefit of the basin.

With no other business, the Council was adjourned.