



WATER RESOURCES RESEARCH GRANT PROPOSAL

Project ID: 2002GA12B

Title: Developing a Regional Water Management and Planning Initiative Model: Using Regional Leadership Summits to Address Water Resource Challenges in the Flint River Watershed, GA

Project Type: Research

Focus Categories: Management and Planning

Keywords: Multiple-objective Planning, Watershed Management, River Basin Development, Regional Initiative, Stakeholder Process, Leadership Summits, Citizen Participation, Landscape Management, Socioeconomic Issues, Ecosystems, Public Health, Natural Resources.

Start Date: 03/01/2002

End Date: 02/28/2003

Federal Funds: \$18,000

Non-Federal Matching Funds: \$36,033

Congressional District: USHS 02

Principal Investigator:

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Abstract

Statement of critical regional water problems. : The Flint River Basin is in the cross-hairs of public policy debate on water. Atlanta resides in the headwaters, irrigated agriculture in the lower basin, and the entire basin is a critical component of the Alabama, Georgia, and Florida interstate water compact negotiations. Concerns over unsustainable consumption of water resulting from uncontrolled growth of metro-Atlanta; water quality issues associated with this urbanization; and agricultural withdrawals of groundwater in southwest Georgia have made water the focus of public policy debate. Conflicts are arising over these water withdrawals to fuel growth, the economy, and sustain the natural resources. During the past four years, these concerns have been heightened by the most severe and prolonged drought of record. This drought has resulted in record low flows and water levels in reservoirs and aquifers; water restrictions and bans; domestic and municipal well failures; communities with fewer than two weeks municipal reserves, and negative impacts on natural resources have raised concerns over long-term water security.

An effective water management strategy is clearly needed to address these challenges and provide a fair and equitable process to allocate and sustain the water resources. The North Georgia Metropolitan Planning District was the first regional strategy created to address the water resource issues. The plan encompasses sixteen counties forming the Greater Atlanta metropolitan area including the upper basin of the Flint River. The Flint River Basin has distinct regional differences in water issues, concerns, and values; sociology; economy; natural resources; governance; and management infrastructure. The formal structure and organization of the metro plan will not work for rural Georgia or the lower Flint River basin. Water decisions, management, regulation and infrastructure are controlled by county, municipal, or organizational entities in the upper basin. In the lower basin, water decisions, management, and infrastructure are primarily controlled by individuals. County and municipal oversight is restricted to a few larger cities. The water management plan; the planning process and organizational structure; and the implementation options,

infrastructure, and policy must be developed to incorporate regional perspectives, values, opportunities, and resources.

Statement of the results, benefits, and/or information expected to be gained during the performance period and by the end of the project, if of longer duration, and how they will be used. The Southwest Georgia Water Resources Leadership Task Force, Inc. (WTF) is facilitating a 30+ county regional effort that represents all constituencies. The WTF has organized public forums known as Southwest Georgia Water Leadership Summits. These summits provide a forum for education and dialog that is responsible for evolving a regional perspective. The leadership of this region is in the early phases of developing a regional water strategy, infrastructure, and authority to address complex water issues. This proposal represents the first phase of a 5-year plan to support the stakeholders of southwest Georgia in developing their water future. Proposed activities include leadership summits, education (e.g. seminars, tours), facilitation among regional organizations, and regional plan development process.

During the next 12 months, The SWGWTF would like to convene two summits of this region's leadership, stakeholders, citizens, and interested parties to refine the elements of a regional strategy, management plan, and authority. The first summit will review past summits' results, presentations from national authorities on regional/watershed initiatives, review of the Joint Study Committee Watershed Sub-Committee, and a facilitated discussion to develop a regional water management plan. Stakeholder working committees will be identified to define the specifics of a working plan and strategy. These elements of a regional plan and strategy will be presented to the larger group during the second summit for evaluation, refinement, and further discussion. A broad-based working group will be established to work with the Task Force to complete a written draft plan for southwest Georgia. Stakeholder sub-committees will develop specific elements of a regional strategy and representatives from each committee will participate on the working committee. Additional information about existing legislative authority and/or impediments will be developed. A working report will be produced from the summits and working group activities. Secondly a proposal will be developed to complete a regional water strategy and, if deemed appropriate, a 1 to 5 year process to formalize its implementation.