

Report for 2002GA12B: Developing a Regional Water Management and Planning Initiative Model: Using Regional Leadership Summits to Address Water Resource Challenges in the Flint River Watershed, GA

There are no reported publications resulting from this project.

Report Follows:

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

Executive Summary

Submitted by: Mary Newcomb, Project Manager
Southwest Georgia Water Resource Task Force, Inc.
November 2003

1. Overview

1.1 Southwest Georgia Water Resources Task Force

The members of the Southwest Georgia Water Resources Task Force, Inc., are volunteers who work together to encourage and facilitate dialog among those interested in regional water issues. Our group neither promotes, nor endorses agendas. The goal of the Task Force is to encourage citizens, groups, regulators, and elected officials to participate in open discussion on water resources issues pertinent to Southwest Georgia.

The Task Force assumes a position of neutrality on all legislative actions. Through educational Water Summits, the Task Force provides an unbiased forum for Southwest Georgian's to exchange ideas and opinions with elected officials, and state and federal agency staff in a neutral setting. This facilitated dialog builds mutual understanding which benefits the region.

The major focus of the Southwest Georgia Water Resources Task Force is to provide unbiased education through water summits that will lead to the empowerment of regional leadership, stewardship, and conservation ethic. The Task Force does not advocate agendas, nor does the Task Force make any effort to shape policy.

The goals of the SWGA Water Resources Task Force are to:

- Educate leaders and citizens about water issues through sponsorship of water leadership summits since 1999;
- Develop leadership stewardship and a conservation ethic in citizens of all ages; creating a society in which each person understands the importance of his actions and chooses to act to conserve water resources; and
- Facilitate the process whereby southwest Georgian's can formulate and implement a self-determined regional plan for equitable and sustainable use of water resources that will benefit all stakeholders, provide incentives for water conservation, and effectively deal with the challenges of increased water demand.

The summits are broadly attended by regional leaders, elected officials, representatives from other regions in the state, state and federal agencies, non governmental organizations, and other interested parties. Leaders in agriculture, industry, commerce, health, municipal and county governments, conservation and recreation from a 30 county region of Southwest Georgia participate. From these summits have emerged educated citizens, stakeholders and a regional leadership; a basic knowledge of water issues; a regional awareness, identity, voice and vision; collaborations, partnerships; and interconnected networks; and an understanding of the importance of citizen responsibility and participation in governance and management.

1.2 Project Activities

This project included the following two activities:

Activity I: June 20, 2002
Water Summit VIII: *Taking Charge of our Future*
Regional Leadership Makes Comprehensive Planning Happen
Date: June 20, 2002

Activity II: October 1, 2002
A ONE HOUR TELEVISED FORUM
GEORGIA'S WATER UPDATE

2. Activity I: Water Summit VIII

“Taking Charge of our Future: Regional Leadership Makes Comprehensive Planning Happen”

June 20, 2002 • 8:30 a.m. until 4:15 p.m.
Darton College Building J
2400 Gillionville Road, Albany, Georgia

2.1 Presentations

Water Summit VIII featured guest speaker Dr. Doug Kenney, Natural Resources Law Center, University of Colorado School of Law. Dr. Kenney spoke about the general goals and principles that should be the foundation of a water management program, and focused on how a “watershed-based” and “stakeholder-oriented” element fits into this strategy. Discussion included key design issues, potential problems or dangers, etc.

Doug Kenney BIO:

Dr. Doug Kenney is a Research Associate at the Natural Resources Law Center, located within the University of Colorado School of Law (Boulder). In that capacity, he designs and implements a comprehensive research agenda examining a variety of public policy issues associated with natural resources, with a particular emphasis on water. He has written extensively

on several water-related issues, including river basin and watershed-level planning, the design of institutional arrangements, and alternative strategies for solving complex resource issues. Recently, he served as a consultant to the Western Water Policy Review Advisory Commission, authoring a special report for the Commission, and co-authoring the final report of the Commission: *Water in the West: Challenge for the Next Century*. Before beginning his current position with the Natural Resources Law Center, he served as a principal technical consultant to the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint and Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa (ACT/ACF) Comprehensive Study, assisting Alabama, Florida, and Georgia in the development of two interstate water compacts. Dr. Kenney has a B.A. in biology from the University of Colorado, a M.S. in Natural Resources Policy and Administration from the University of Michigan, and a Ph.D. in Renewable Natural Resource Studies from the University of Arizona.

Additional speakers included:

Woody Hicks
Hydrologist
Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center
Update: Water Resources Conditions

Dr. David Stookesbury
Georgia State Climatologist
Climate & Drought

Dr. Elizabeth R. Blood
Education & Outreach Ecologist, Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center

Dr. Doug Kenney
Natural Resources Law Center, University of Colorado School of Law
Regional Water Resources Planning

Nap Caldwell & Harold Reheis
EPD Efforts

2.2 Summary of Facilitated Discussion:

What elements do you suggest be part of SWGA's water management strategy?

What blocks would build on the drought working committees' reports?

Management structure defined from the bottom-up

ACF basin could use a management authority to administer water

conservation, permitting and related issues. Suggest using an ACF water management authority that administers the entire basin w/ 4 to 6 water management districts overseeing the actions in GA

Local input/control at a regional level

Monitoring of water use is imperative (ground and surface), w/ fees for certain types and amounts of usage in a manner similar to the way municipal electric, gas, and water are regulated (compensation for use of a public resource)

Some kind of entity defined from bottom up

Water management agency with local control + state/local funding

State funding w/ local contribution

Water management district managed by elected representatives of each stakeholder groups:

- Funding would be provided by taxation.
- District would have authority to manage area's water resources under guidelines developed by the district and GA EPD Jointly.
- GA EPD would participate as member of WMD board.
- WMD would conduct independent monitoring program separate from GA EPD.
- Water use permit would be issued or rescinded based on specific set of criteria: 1) existing density of water use; 2) capacity of the aquifer to meet additional pumping (water use); 3) connectivity of the aquifer to local streams specific to the area where the additional withdrawal is requested; 4) other criteria such as intended water use (public supply should be highest priority), water quality constraints, pending climatic conditions, etc.

Water management district concept:

- Selected representation by stakeholder group
- Need government authority for taxation, land use planning, enforcement
- (basin-wide management)
- Strong professional staff
- Data-based decisions
- No blanket, region-wide application of policies: look at data in a
- specific area
- Florida model without bureaucracy

Conservation

- Make water use more efficient: a) old irrigation systems; b) industry
- procedures; c) household procedures

- Ascending water rates: M+I
- Certification process for farmers (all new permits) for water conservation
- BMPs
- Efficiency for new and existing irrigation systems
- Require new industries to implement conservation measures
- Water conservation plans during all conditions for health, municipal
- Incentives
 - Cost share to upgrade agricultural equipment for water conservation
 - CRP or similar program to take marginal land out of production
 - Incentives for industry to reuse/recycle/conserve water
 - Incentives to retire marginal land from farming (CRP and other programs)
 - and to retain undeveloped high recharge land in open space (Chickasawhatchee Swamp, etc.)
 - State cost-share program or other incentives to conserve water (ag, industrial, municipal, residential)
 - Water conservation cost-share program for ag (and other efficiencies)

Monitoring and research

- Monitoring of surface/ground water and aquatic species
- Better information – research
- Intermediate flow targets along entire lengths of rivers to ensure
- protection of rivers for benefit and use of stakeholders

Financial compensation

- Financial protection for those who give up water
- Retirement of water rights as available w/ compensation

Manage water quality and quantity

- Include water quality and quantity
- Protection of recharge areas
- Increase land uses that conserve surface and groundwater while improving
- soil moisture and groundwater recharge potential to maintain base flows in
- streams

Need to be proactive in evaluating existing rules and existing problems which, though small now, could escalate. Need to implement land use controls and incorporate into state rules requirements which recognize the special conditions karst geology presents and define more stringent safeguards to prevent groundwater, as well as surface water, degradation. Have a prevention orientation vs. a reactive one.

Drought planning

- Define "drought conditions" (indicators)
- Drought plan approved before drought

Education

- Educate the population
- Education at all levels
- Education before enforcement for all stakeholder groups

Miscellaneous

- No interbasin transfers
- Vision for the river

Full group discussion: Suggested elements for SW GA's water/drought management strategy

Need local autonomy.

Establish a water management district of some sort, with all stakeholders represented and agribusiness having a higher proportion of representation given the proportion of agricultural water use.

Ensure a bottom-up definition of whatever we create: an entity defined by local citizens not imposed by the state. And, whatever the entity is, it needs to have authority (i.e., have some teeth).

Need an organization with local control, local input, teeth to speak for the people, and with good science to act upon. We don't want to be in the middle without a voice.

But, we need more complete information before putting such authority in place.

A district would (or could) allow the collection of revenue to fund the science needed to make decisions.

Note that communication among interested parties can make a formal district unnecessary.

If established, a district should have some commonality to be successful. Look at existing studies to establish the boundaries: use information from existing studies to identify common-sense boundaries based on resource characteristics and resource use rather than political boundaries.

"Commission" or decision making body: how will it be chosen?

Possibilities include gubernatorial appointees, elected commissioners, commissioners selected by each stakeholder group. Participants expressed preferences for one of the latter two options.

One table suggested the commission include a representative from EPD.

Funding sources (short-term and long-term):

How will this organization be funded in a way that maintains local control?

Some participants felt people in the region will have to pay for it, and should be willing to pay for it as an acceptable cost of local control. Costs should be allocated equitable and any taxes or fees should apply to all property owners, not just farmers. A tax may not have to be very large (e.g., \$100 annual tax bill for a water management district in Florida). But, we must think carefully about imposition of local taxation, fees, etc. to support a local program. The burden of additional costs on farmers, in particular, should be considered.

Other participants suggested it should be a mix of state, local, and other funds, because areas up and downstream will benefit from this effort in a variety of ways.

Don't make decisions about management districts until more meetings like this have been held and the data being collected demonstrate a need for them.

As an interim step, perhaps a commission could be established to guide EPD's five-year study.

Provide incentives for water conservation in all stakeholder sectors (agricultural, business, residential): incentives for farmers to increase irrigation efficiency; incentives to retire marginal land, shift dry land to tree farming, and protect recharge areas.

Clearly make links between the "district" and other planning entities (e.g., RDCs) and link our activities with other plans.

Provide financial protection for all stakeholders who give up water use (e.g., industry and municipal users, not just agriculture users).

Must balance human use with environmental needs: how much water is available for human use after meeting ecosystem requirements? Need good science to answer this question.

Need to demonstrate efficient, reliable use of water (can help forestall imposition of more heavy-handed regulation).

Funding for small communities to meet any mandates, requirements.

Need a regional, multi-state vision for the Flint River should look like in 40-50 years.

Provide education about water use, conservation across all sectors (e.g., BMPs).

Pay attention the economic base of local communities: balance so that decisions don't destroy the economic base.

Recognize that local control may have to make ugly decisions locally – a "district" may not be just a lobbying organization. But, we need to put a positive spin on this; also recognize the benefits an organization can provide and the ways it can help us take advantage of opportunities.

Funding is needed from the state for data collection so that science can be done to head off some of the "ugly" decisions, to take a more positive approach.

In Florida, the water management districts put some farmers out of business and are seen as taking over control in some counties.

Invite speakers from existing water management districts to help educate us: this may or may not be the right approach for this region. But, either way, we shouldn't reinvent the wheel.

Where do we go from here?

Need to have more meetings like this, and more information, before we move to decisions about forming a district, a commission, or whatever. That doesn't necessarily mean wait for EPD to finish their five-year Flint River Water Development and Conservation Plan. But, it does mean we should continue laying the groundwork for these decisions and not act before the necessary information is available.

At the same time, we need to be aware that things are already happening and we can't wait too long before making decisions.

Note that funding is available for two summits in the next year.

Find out if legislative authority or impediments to regional water management exist. Is there legislation that provides the authority for an entity like that under discussion? If not, that should be established.

Need to face the hard questions: continue the drought working committees; extend current models to look at periods of shortfall; talk about what must be done.

If this is to be a multi-county entity, how do you get buy-in from all counties, from all stakeholders?

Need to get buy-in from this group and then talk about how to build support and buy-in across the region.

We need a community/watershed vision (economy, quality of life, etc.) before we can get to the point of making proposals.

Ultimately, the General Assembly must deal with the question of who owns the water. You can't make allocation decisions until there is legislation that answers this question.

We need to realize that there are other groups in the state who are making decisions, who have a sense of urgency about water: "he who has the money or the votes will get the water."

Next steps

- Set up a group to work with the Task Force and with the stakeholder
- committees to develop a proposal for completing a regional water management
- strategy in way that: 1) builds on the results of the drought working
- committees and 2) follows the direction provided by this and preceding
- summits. This expanded group will put together a strawman for a 1-5 year
- process and bring it to the next summit for review and revision.
- Get information about existing legislative authority and/or impediments. At
- the same time, pursue a resolution from Governor and/or General Assembly to
- formally recognize this effort and provide a window of opportunity.
- Pursue funding sources

3. Activity II: Georgia's Water Update

WHO: WALB –TV & The SWGA Water Resources Task Force, Inc.
WHAT: A one hour televised forum
WHEN: October 1, 2002 - TIME: Tuesday, 7:00 P.M. – 8:00 P.M.
WHERE: WALB-TV Studio, Stuart Avenue, Albany, GA
WHY: To facilitate the opportunity to provide the public with a forum in which questions can be asked regarding state compact negotiations

3.1 Segment 1: Bob Kerr & Woody Hicks

TOPIC FOR THIS SEGMENT: ACF/ACT NEGOTIATIONS: WATER WARS
Robert (Bob) Kerr, Chief Negotiator, ACT & ACF Compact (Robert Kerr represents Governor Barnes as the chief negotiator in the ACT & ACF Compact) and Woody Hicks, Hydrologist, Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center answered questions on the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee Flint Compact Allocation Negotiations and how they could affect you.

3.2 Segment 2: Harold Reheis & Dr. Elizabeth Blood

TOPIC FOR THIS SEGMENT: JOINT COMPREHENSIVE WATER PLAN STUDY COMMISSION REPORT: MANAGING GEORGIA'S WATER – IS THERE ENOUGH TO LAST? Harold Reheis, Director of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division & Dr. Elizabeth Blood, Ecologist with the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center answered questions on the recently completed Joint Study Committee's sweeping recommendations for Georgia Water Planning.

3.3 Segment 3: Napoleon Caldwell, Georgia EPD & Murray Campbell

TOPIC FOR THIS SEGMENT: REGIONAL WATER PLANNING: DETERMINING OUR OWN FUTURE. Nap Caldwell, GA Environmental Protection Division & Murray Campbell, Mitchell County Farmer & Owner/Operator of CoveyRise Plantation answered questions about how you and other citizens in SWGA can have a say in your water future.

3.4 Segment 4: Dr. Elizabeth Blood, Woody Hicks, Murray Campbell & Susan Reyher (Director of Environmental Health, Dougherty County)

TOPIC FOR THIS SEGMENT #4: (LOCAL IMPACT SEGMENT) WATER WRAP UP: SUMMATION - Creating a Water Management Plan for the State.