

Georgia Environmental Protection Division
Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Council
Public Involvement Plan Memorandum

I. INTRODUCTION

Public involvement is a primary element in the work of the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council (herein referred to as the “Council”). The Council prepared a Public Involvement Plan which was published on the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Council’s website in November 2009. This memorandum summarizes the Public Involvement Plan (included as an attachment to this technical memorandum) and the activities undertaken by the Council during the development of the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Regional Water Plan.

The Council provided opportunities for meaningful input from key stakeholders, representatives of local government, and the general public. In general, it was at the discretion of the Chair of the Council to permit public comment or to adjust or adapt specific meeting timelines and constraints for public input, so long as the following principles of the public input process were followed:

- Stakeholders and regional water planning council members will treat each other with respect and dignity;
- All participants will have an open mind and participate openly and honestly;
- The regional water planning process will continue with concurrent public comment throughout;
- Georgia EPD will provide public notice and take public comment on draft regional water plans after they are submitted;
- Stakeholder comments will be pertinent to the topic of the meeting at which they are expressed; and
- Input from the public, key stakeholders, and local government representatives will be considered and incorporated in Council work products, and responses to public input will be provided where appropriate.

Key stakeholders for the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Region are identified below. All members of the public had opportunities for input, even if not specifically identified in this section.

- Local government officials – cities and counties within the water planning region
- Neighboring regional water planning councils – water planning councils that share borders and/or water resources
- Regional Commissions – agencies supporting local and regional comprehensive planning

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- Agriculture – includes water permit holders and non-permitted water users for agricultural applications
- Businesses – includes local businesses
- Industries – includes industrial water permit holders and municipally-supplied industrial facilities
- Energy – includes energy businesses, emerging power interests, and hydroelectric users
- Forestry – includes owners of managed forest lands and the forest products industry
- Institutions/educational/schools – includes public and private schools as well as institutions
- Tourism – includes public and private organizations related to local travel and tourism
- Recreation – includes citizens and industry related to recreational water uses
- Environment – includes citizens, agencies, and groups focused on environmental protection
- Water and Sewer Authorities, Utilities and Service Providers – includes public and private entities in the water planning region that provide water and wastewater services
- Public – any citizen interested in the regional water planning process
- Navigation – includes parties having interests in waterway navigation

The Council approved a Public Involvement Plan during Council Meeting 4 on November 17, 2009. The plan provides the process of how the council will seek stakeholder participation during the planning process. This plan is attached at the end of this memorandum.

II. Council Meetings

Time was provided at every Council meeting for input from stakeholders and the public. To facilitate a fair and efficient process, the Council adopted the following procedures for public comment during Council meetings:

- All Council meetings were open meetings
- Stakeholders were provided an opportunity to provide comments pertinent to the meeting topics
- Time for public comments were provided at all Council meetings
- Provisions for written comments were made at all Council meetings

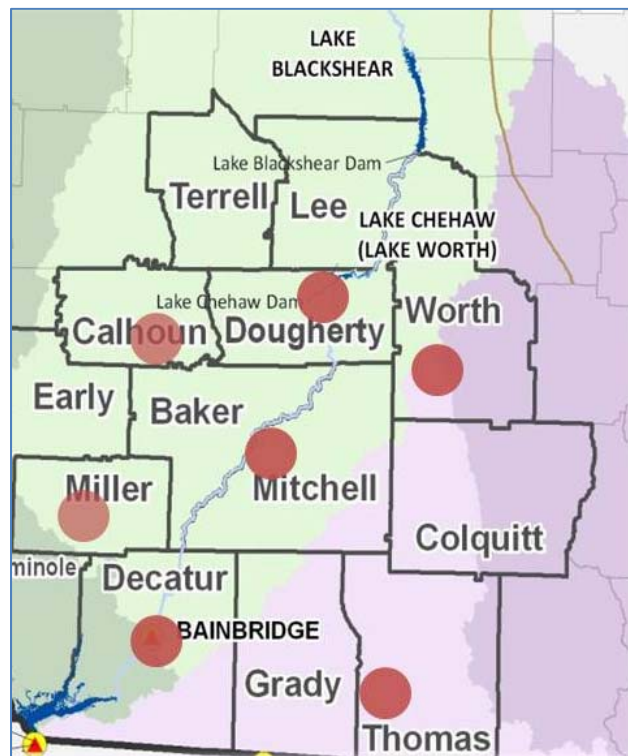
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All the Council meetings were open to the public and public notices were posted on the Council website (<http://www.flintochlockonee.org>) with a meeting agenda two weeks prior to a meeting. In addition, the public notices were sent via email to the following:

- The Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG), Georgia Association of Water Professionals, and Georgia Rural Water Association.
- All points-of-contact for each region's group of local government representatives. GMA and ACCG agreed to collect the names and contact information for municipal and county government points of contact, develop and maintain region-specific databases of these contacts, and share the databases with EPD. EPD used the databases to e-mail information to the contacts announcing upcoming council meetings.
- Interested parties including: a) people who attended Council meetings and provided an email address indicating that they would like to receive such notices; b) people who asked the Planning Contractor to be notified via the regional water planning web sites or other means; and, c) people who asked EPD to be notified.

The Council meetings were held throughout the region to provide opportunities for the public input from throughout the whole planning region. The general locations where Council meetings were held are noted with large red circles in the following map.

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Eleven members of the public addressed the Council during the Council meetings as shown in the following table.

Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Council Meeting Public Comment Summary		
Council Meeting	Local Elected Officials	Members of the Public
1	None	Charles Stripling Shana Udvardy, Georgia Conservancy Glen Heard, Decatur County Farm Bureau
2	None	None
3	None	None
4	None	David Burke, Oil Dri Corporation Gordon Rogers, Flint Riverkeeper Jeffery Harvey, Georgia Farm Bureau
5	None	Oscar Jackson
6	None	Newton Cloud, Spring Creek Watershed Partnership
7	None	None
8	None	Luke Crossen, GSWCC Woody Hicks
9	None	Frank Yancey
10	None	None

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Written comments and web comments were summarized and provided to the Council in meeting packets. Oral comments were summarized and included in meeting summaries. Meeting summaries were posted on the Council website and are included with Council's regional water plan as a supplemental document located on the Council website.

III. Coordination with Other Councils

The Council coordinated with other regional water councils through numerous joint meetings to discuss shared resources and common concerns. Several joint meetings were organized by EPD:

- Kick-off meeting: Georgia Aquarium, March 13, 2009
- Joint Meetings in January & February 2010 to review resource assessments (6 meetings in locations around the state)
- Regional Water Councils Joint Meeting, October 6, 2010, Macon State College
- Ad Hoc In-stream Flows Meeting, December 7, 2010, Macon Water Treatment Plant

Additionally, the Council participated in several joint meetings called by itself and its neighboring councils (Upper Flint and Middle Chattahoochee):

- Joint meeting of ACF Council Chairs and Vice-chairs, May 10, 2010, Fort Valley State University
- Joint meeting of ACF Council Chairs and Vice-chairs, September 3, 2010, Griffin
- Joint Meeting of Upper Flint and Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Quantity Committees, October 26, 2010, Albany
- Joint Meeting of ACF Councils, January 27, 2011, Columbus

The joint meetings provided the council with an opportunity to identify new ideas for its plan and to coordinate with other councils in the use and protection of shared water resources.

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IV. Other Participation Opportunities

The public had other ways to participate in the process. Any email or letter sent to Georgia EPD or directly to the Council was shared with the Council. These letters or emails, where appropriate, were included in the individual Council meeting packets.

Synopses of the March 2010 Water Resource Assessments were posted for public review and comment. EPD compiled a summary of comments received and provided responses to those comments.

In addition, the regional water plans will be posted for public review and comment beginning in May 2011. Comments will be documented, and responses will be made.

Together, the opportunities summarized in the memorandum allowed relevant and diverse input and improved the quality of the recommended regional water plans.



Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council Public Involvement Plan

Public involvement is a primary element in the work of the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council. This document describes the public involvement activities to be undertaken by the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council. The Council, assisted by its regional planning contractor, will follow this Public Involvement Plan to provide opportunities for meaningful input from key stakeholders, representatives of local governments, and the general public. In general, it is at the discretion of the Chair of the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council to permit additional public comment or to adjust or adapt to specific meeting timelines and constraints, so long as the intent and expectations described below are followed.

Guiding principles

The Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council recognizes the benefit and importance of providing opportunities for diverse input throughout the regional water planning process. The principles of the public input process are:

- Stakeholders and Council members will treat each other with respect and dignity;
- All participants will have an open mind and participate openly and honestly;
- The regional water planning process will continue with concurrent public comment throughout;
- Georgia EPD will provide public notice and take public comment on draft regional water plans after they are submitted;
- Stakeholder comments will be pertinent to the topic of the meeting at which they are expressed; and
- Input from the public, key stakeholders, and local government representatives will be considered and incorporated in Council work products.

Key stakeholders

The key stakeholders for the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Region are identified below. All members of the public will have opportunities for input, even if not specifically identified in this section.

- Local Governments -- within the water planning region
- Neighboring regional water planning councils – water planning councils that share borders and/or water resources
- Regional Commissions – agencies supporting local and regional comprehensive planning
- Agriculture – includes water permit holders for agricultural applications
- Businesses – includes local businesses (this audience may be sub-divided into more specific categories)
- Industries – includes industrial water permit holders and municipally-supplied industrial facilities
- Forestry – includes owners of managed forest lands and the forest products industry
- Institutions/educational/schools – includes public and private schools as well as institutions
- Tourism – includes public and private organizations related to local travel and tourism
- Recreation – includes citizens and industry related to recreational water uses
- Environment – includes citizens, agencies, and groups focused on environmental protection
- Public – any citizen interested in the regional water planning process

Procedural criteria

Time will be provided at every Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council meeting for input from stakeholders and the public. The procedural criteria are intended to ensure the public respects the Council's schedule constraints and the Council respects the public's opportunity to present relevant and different opinions. To facilitate a fair and efficient process, the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council has adopted the following procedures for public comment.

- All Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council meetings will be open meetings
- Stakeholders will be provided an opportunity to provide comments pertinent to the topic of the meeting in which they are expressed
- Time for public comments will be provided at all Council meetings
- Provisions for written comments will be made at all Council meetings

The Chair of the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council will use discretion to manage public comment under different circumstances in ways that enable the Council to progress with its work and respect those who want to comment.

Meeting announcements

All Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council meetings will be open meetings, including at least a 24-hour notice of any meetings. The following provisions will be made for all Council meetings to inform the public of upcoming meetings.

- Posted on the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council website (<http://www.flintochlockonee.org>) with a meeting agenda or summary of topics to be covered, meeting time, and meeting address
- Announced in a press release
- Posted at the meeting location with a meeting agenda or summary of topics to be covered, meeting time, and meeting address
- Meeting summaries will be posted on the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council website (<http://www.flintochlockonee.org>)

Stakeholder and public comment opportunities

Specific opportunities during the regional water planning process for stakeholder and public input include but are not limited to the following.

- Meetings of the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council
- Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council website: <http://www.flintochlockonee.org> (documents will be posted periodically with timeframes for comment and mechanisms for comment clearly stated)
- Letters may be mailed to Georgia EPD (Address: Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Division, 2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Suite 1152, East Tower, Atlanta, GA 30334)

- Emails to the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council and/or Georgia EPD
- Georgia EPD public notice period for the resource assessments
- Georgia EPD public notice period on the draft regional water plans

The Council, at the discretion of the Chair, may permit additional stakeholder and public comment opportunities, as deemed appropriate. In the event that public input seems insufficient, the Council, with the assistance of the regional planning contractor, may make additional efforts to solicit input.

Local governments

Much of the implementation of the regional water plans is the responsibility of local governments; therefore input will be sought from local government officials and staff on the following specific topics.

- Regional population, economic and employment forecasts
- Fiscal implications of water management practices
- Draft regional water plan

The Council and local government representatives should identify proper communication pathways. The following actions are intended to coordinate activities of the local governments with the Council.

- Local government officials and staff will be provided an opportunity at the Council meetings to comment on the regional water planning process and items on the meeting agenda
- Local government officials and staff may provide written comments to the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council, as needed.

Other regional water planning councils

In order to plan and coordinate the use and protection of shared water resources, the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council will coordinate with adjacent and hydrologically-connected councils throughout the regional water planning process. Georgia EPD will convene some meetings to discuss shared water resources, such as on the current resource assessments. The Council will use the following communication pathways to coordinate with adjacent regional water planning councils.

- Members of the Council will attend shared resource meetings and other joint meetings
- At the discretion of the Chair, an opportunity may be provided at Council meetings for announcements or progress reports from adjacent regional water planning councils

At the discretion of the Chair, the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council may provide for additional coordination with adjacent regional water planning councils, as deemed appropriate.

Review and consideration of public input

The objective of this process is to gather relevant and diverse input to improve the quality of the recommended regional water plan. Once public comments are received from the public and key stakeholders the Lower Flint-Ochlockonee Water Planning Council, with the assistance of the regional planning contractor, will consider and address these comments. Written comments and web comments will be summarized and provided to Council members. Verbal comments will be summarized and included in meeting summaries.

Adopted November 17, 2009