

# PANEL DISCUSSION: LESSONS LEARNED AND MOVING FORWARD IN STATEWIDE WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Gail M. Cowie

---

*AUTHOR:* Public Service Associate, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia 201 North Milledge Ave., Athens, GA 30602.

*SESSION ORGANIZERS:* Alice Miller Keyes, The Georgia Conservancy, 1776 Peachtree St. NW, Suite 400 S, Atlanta, GA 30309; David Moore, Troutman Sanders, LLP, 600 Peachtree Street, NE, Suite 5200, Atlanta, GA 30308-2216; Nolton Johnson, Water Resources Branch - GA EPD, 2 Martin Luther King, Suite 1058 East Floyd Tower, Atlanta, GA 30334.

*REFERENCE:* *Proceedings of the 2003 Georgia Water Resources Conference*, held April 23-24, 2003, at the University of Georgia. Kathryn J. Hatcher, editor, Institute of Ecology, The University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

---

**Abstract.** From a number of perspectives, water resources protection and management are among the most critical concerns facing Georgia. Recent and pending decisions, on-going planning activities, development of a comprehensive state water plan, if authorized and funded, together lay the groundwork for future water management. The processes and results of planning and management activities conducted to date, including those of the Joint Comprehensive Water Plan Study Committee, the North Georgia Metropolitan Water Planning District, and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, provide a palette from which to draw to identify approaches that seem most promising for future statewide planning efforts, as well as those that may prove problematic.

“Legal challenges and opportunities facing Georgia - Is water a public resource or private commodity?”

Beyond these decisions, then, other considerations will be important as Georgia moves forward with statewide water planning. The second session in this track “Statewide Water Resource Protection, Planning and Management” highlights some of the complexities in water quantity management. In particular, the session underscores the promise and challenges in integrating scientific information with legal and policy considerations in order to manage the state’s water comprehensively as resources that must support, and are impacted by, multiple and competing uses.

## PANELISTS AND CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

- C. Ronald Carroll, River Basin Science and Policy Center, University of Georgia
- Stephen Draper, The Draper Group
- Mary A. Elfner, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
- Tom McCall, Georgia General Assembly
- Pat Stevens, North Georgia Metropolitan Planning District, Atlanta Regional Commission

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At the time of this writing, proposals before the General Assembly would add an explicit public benefit goal for water management to the state code or incorporate elements of a regulated market approach. Or, the decision may be to move forward without changing the statutory basis for the current regulated riparian system in which water is treated as a resource to be managed for the public good. These fundamental decisions are the focus of the first session in this track,

## LESSONS LEARNED AND MOVING FORWARD

This session will focus on the lessons that can be drawn from the preceding panels and presentations, as well as recent planning activities at the state, regional, and local levels (including but not limited to the North Metropolitan Georgia Water Planning District and the Joint Study Committee). Discussion will highlight lessons from these experiences that panelists see as most applicable to moving forward with statewide water planning. Considerations that may prove critical to the effectiveness of future planning efforts include the following:

- Who should initiate comprehensive water planning and what qualifications should be established for participation on planning bodies?
- How should planning be structured in light of complex hydrologic boundaries that differ from geopolitical boundaries? How should hydrologic connections be addressed during the planning process in order to manage them effectively (e.g., land-water interfaces, upstream-downstream impacts, surface-groundwater connections)?

- Activities at the state and regional levels. What bodies should be primarily responsible for water planning at the state and regional levels? What role(s) should the General Assembly have in formulation of a comprehensive state water plan? What role(s) should state agencies have in formulation of river basin, aquifer or regional water plans?
- How do we successfully integrate water conservation into water supply planning and show that by investing in water use efficiency we can delay expensive water supply capital investments?
- What is the role of the University System in providing the scientific and educational information required to protect Georgia's water resources?
- Stakeholder and public participation. How should participation across sectors and interest groups be structured to be most effective? What obstacles and opportunities have been evident in recent planning efforts?
- There is general recognition that an informed and supportive public is one key to effective management of water resources. What types of public education and outreach will be required to accomplish statewide water planning? What opportunities and obstacles have been evident in recent planning efforts?
- How should disputes in statewide planning processes be resolved?

From state and regional perspectives, and drawing on experience in the public, academic, and private sectors, panelists will address these and other questions related to future progress with statewide water planning.