

THE UPPER FLINT RIVER WATERSHED ALLIANCE: FINDING SOLUTIONS TO COMMON GOALS

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Abstract. The Upper Flint River Watershed Alliance was formed to protect, preserve, and enhance the unique resources of the Upper Flint watershed. In order to find solutions to common goals, and to address the future of the region's water resources, this diverse group of city and county governments, landowners, regional and state agencies, environmental advocacy groups, and economic development and tourism representatives have come together to work to protect, preserve and enhance the unique resources of the Upper Flint Watershed. This paper will focus on the challenges of launching this initiative, the mission of the group, and its visions of success.

INTRODUCTION

The Upper Flint River Watershed Alliance was formed to bring together the various parties concerned about the future of the Upper Flint River. Born under the runways of Hartsfield Jackson International Airport, the Upper Flint faces serious challenges from its start. Flowing through concrete channels, the Flint is an excellent example of the resilient nature of rivers as, once daylighted, it becomes one of the most scenic rivers in the state, home to numerous federally protected species. The Alliance, seeking to be an advocate for the river, is concerned not only with the protection of the scenic beauty of the river, but also about the potential impacts of statewide water planning on the river basin.

LAUNCHING THE UPPER FLINT RIVER WATERSHED ALLIANCE

Bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders to address the many issues in the Upper Flint watershed is a challenging task. While seen as conflicting, the importance of recognizing that economic growth and environmental protection can go hand in hand is the primary hurdle to clear in creating a place at the table for myriad stakeholders. The diversity of interests in the Upper Flint Watershed Alliance, from business owners to

tourism representatives to environmental advocates, all have the same goal: protecting, preserving and enhancing the Upper Flint River.

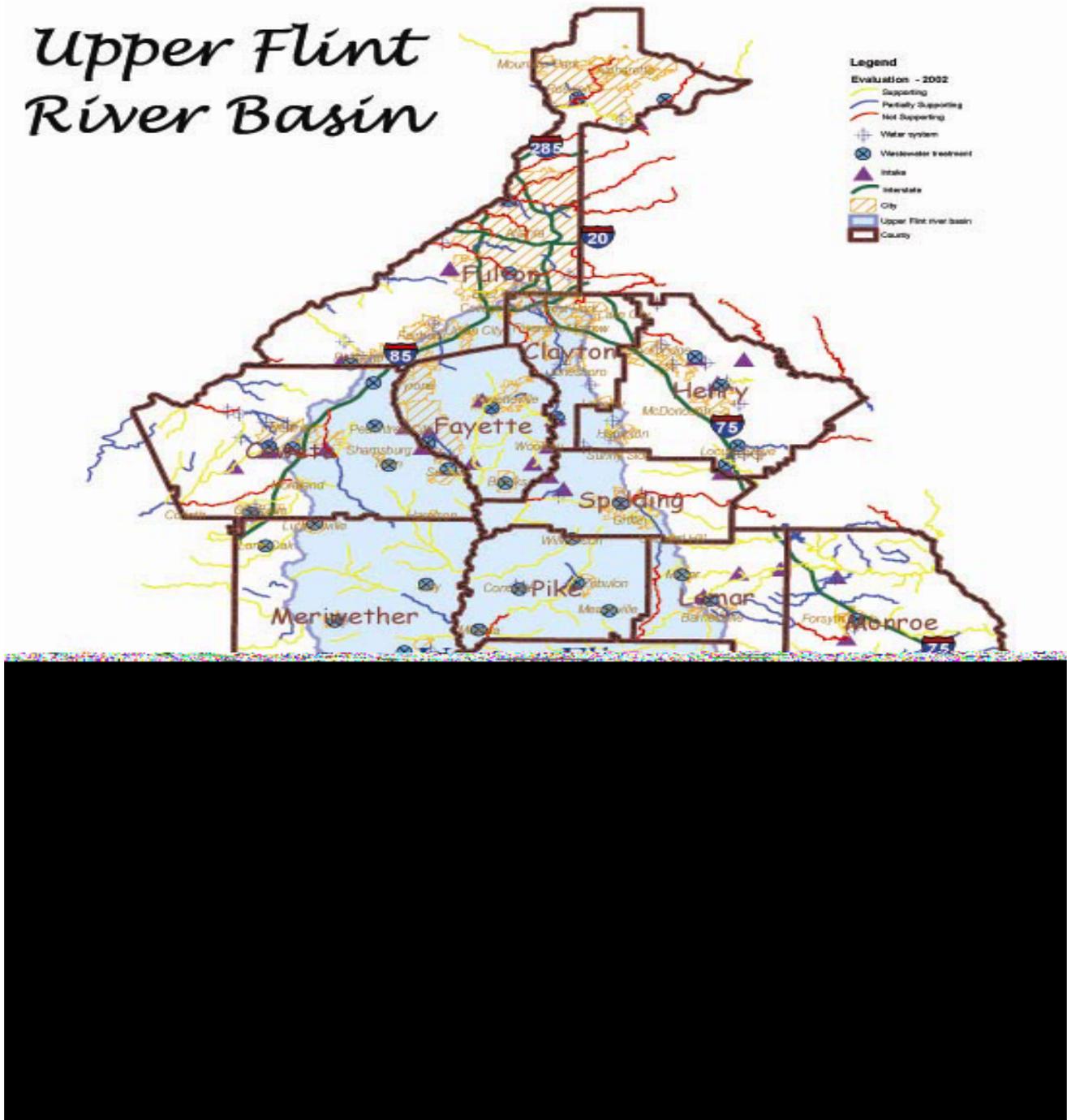
The stakeholders include local governments, economic developers, tourism officials, landowners, businesses, conservation groups, agricultural extension agents. Support has also come from state and federal agencies such as the Department of Community Affairs, Department of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection Division, the National Park Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Other regional and statewide partners include the Georgia Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy of Georgia, Georgia Rivers Network, the Georgia Farm Bureau, the McIntosh Trail Regional Development Center, the Chattahoochee-Flint Regional Development Center, and the Atlanta Regional Commission.

While working to bring as many different stakeholders to the table as possible is not an easy task, it is an important effort to building credibility for the Alliance and to accurately represent regional interests. Inclusion provides for a broader base of advocates for the Upper Flint and a more respected regional voice. In order to serve as that unified voice in the state water management planning process, the Alliance began the process of determining its mission and visions of success.

THE MISSION OF THE ALLIANCE

At its earliest meetings, the stakeholders worked to create a mission statement for the Upper Flint River Watershed Alliance that would lay out the purpose of the organization. Many participants viewed each other as competing interests, and the challenge was to capture the intentions of all representatives. Once established, the mission serves to guide the efforts of the group: to protect, preserve, and enhance the unique resources of the watershed. None of the participating stakeholders want to see the river deteriorate, and are willing to work together to protect the Upper Flint and its watershed.

Upper Flint River Basin



The Flint is a water supply source, an ecotourism destination, and a habitat for endangered species. It is a lesson in history as two former Presidents, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Jimmy Carter, spent many hours along its banks. The Flint is contained wholly within the State of Georgia, thus the people of the Georgia are truly responsible for its health. It also has one of only 42 free flowing river reaches longer than 125 miles remaining in the lower 48 states. Protecting the Upper Flint is not just a purpose of the Alliance, but it is a necessity for the state. As demands on our water resources increase with

continuing growth and development, it is vitally important that the Flint's needs, that is, its instream demands, be met as well.

VISIONS OF SUCCESS

The idea of an Upper Flint River Watershed Alliance actually began at a Department of Community Affairs Region 4 Advisory Council (RAC) Strategic Planning session in late 2001. The RAC had made greenspace protection and promotion a priority in 2001, and realized

