

THE PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THE INITIAL EDITION OF GEORGIA'S COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN

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REFERENCE: proceedings of the 2005 Georgia Water Resources Conference, held April 25-27, 2005, at the University of Georgia. Kathryn J. Hatcher, editor, Institute of Ecology, The University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

Abstract. The 2004 Comprehensive Water Management Planning Act charged the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) with developing a Comprehensive Statewide Water Management Plan for Georgia under the guidance of an array of principles spelled out in the Act. The Plan, the first edition of which is to be completed by EPD by July of 2007, is to recommend State level water policies that would guide river basin and aquifer management in accordance with regional and local aspirations not inconsistent with State water management goals. While a set of guiding principles and a time frame for developing the Plan were well-defined within the Act, it was left to EPD and the Water Council - a body created by the Act - to conceive and execute a stakeholder driven process that would culminate in the first edition of the Plan being presented to the Georgia Legislature for adoption during the 2008 legislative session. Products previously generated by the 2001 Joint Comprehensive Water Plan Study Committee and others will be used by EPD and the Water Council to inform the planning process. Collection and evaluation of input from several formally constituted stakeholders groups will also be an essential part of the planning process.

HISTORY AND LEGISLATIVE INTENT

The Final Report of the 2001 Joint Comprehensive Water Plan Study Committee (JWSC), which led to enactment of the 2004 Comprehensive Water Management Planning Act, anticipated the Comprehensive Statewide Water Management Plan would be comprised of two essential components: the state component and the sub-state component. The 'state component' would describe the array of statutes, rules, and regulatory policies needed to guide the State's water management programs toward success in meeting Georgia's water management goals. It is expected that Georgia's current policy framework will require some degree of updating to embrace the lessons learned and changed circumstances since the foundation of the current policy framework began to be developed several decades ago. Guided by the updated policy framework, the 'sub-state component' would consist of development of a series

of integrated region-specific groundwater and surface water management strategies that address both off-stream and instream water needs. Due to financial resources constraints, the first edition of the Comprehensive Statewide Water Management Plan is expected to be limited to addressing the state component.

THE PROCESS

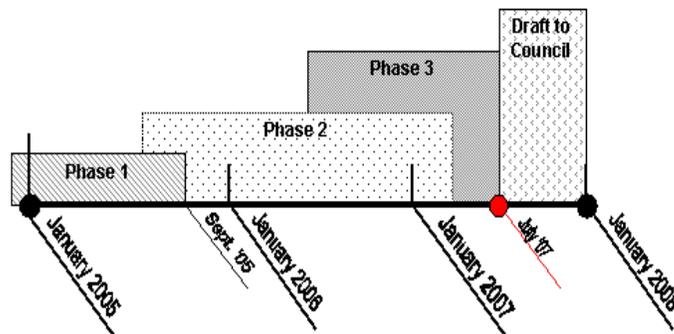
Dr. Carol Couch, Director of EPD, has recommended to The Water Council that a 3-phase process be employed to arrive at a final draft of the first edition of the Comprehensive Statewide Water Management Plan. The first phase will address gaps in Georgia's water policy framework, and will utilize the findings of the JWSC. Rather than starting anew, this phase began in early 2005 with evaluation of the 42 water policy and management issues previously identified by the JWSC. Issues on that list are being prioritized so as to capture those that our 'lessons learned' and 'changed circumstances' suggest are most critically in need of addressing as we reformulate Georgia's policy framework for the near-term. In addition to identifying and describing these key policy issues, phase one will describe the relevance and importance of these issues to effective water management. Finally, as a prelude to the discussions that will occur in the second phase, work in the first phase will suggest a range of statutory and regulatory approaches that might be considered in addressing these water policy issues.

The second phase of the process will be comprised of approximately 70 professionally facilitated meetings with three configurations of stakeholders groups throughout Georgia. One purpose of these meetings is to describe the set of priority water policy issues and their relevance to future effective water management. Stakeholders' input is likely to be more substantive and meaningful if the stakeholders are provided with clear and contextual descriptions of the policy issues. The ultimate purpose of the meetings is to collect stakeholders' substantive input on how these issues might best be addressed in Georgia statutes, regulations, and/or in the water management policies of state agencies with water resources management responsibilities (i.e., the Policy Framework).

The three configurations of stakeholders groups are as follows: 1) a statewide stakeholders advisory committee expected to be comprised of executive level representatives of industrial, municipal, conservation, and commercial groups; 2) a series of river basin stakeholders advisory committees with representatives from each of Georgia’s major river basins; and 3) an undetermined number of issue-specific technical advisory committees with representatives who have some level of expertise on the technical issue around which each of these committees is formed. It is anticipated that there will also be extensive use of the Water Council’s (*georgiawatercouncil.com*) website for both dissemination of information on the issues, and collection of public input. This second phase, the stakeholder involvement phase, will overlap portions of the first and third phases, and will necessarily be the most time-consuming and complex of the three phases.

The third phase of the process will consist of evaluation of stakeholder input and incorporation of that input into development of the water policy recommendations to be included in the first edition of the Comprehensive Statewide Water Management Plan. In this phase the drafting of the initial version of the plan will occur. It is expected that a series of regional town hall meetings will be held toward the middle of the third phase to solicit comments from the public after an early draft of the first edition of the Comprehensive Statewide Water Management Plan is complete.

The entire 3-phase process is expected to unfold over a 30-month period spanning January 2005 to December 2007. Approximations of the duration of each phase are shown in the graphic below.



CONCLUSION

This 3-phase approach to developing the first edition of Georgia’s Comprehensive Statewide Water Management Plan will use the body of work completed by the JWSC as the starting point for identification of gaps in the State’s water policy framework. The process will employ an expansive stakeholders involvement phase to ensure that recommended modifications of Georgia’s water management policy framework reflect broad based input from throughout the State.

LITERATURE CITED

O.C.G.A. Section 12-5-522, 2004 Comprehensive Statewide Water Management Planning Act
 Senate Resolution 142, *Final Report of the Joint Comprehensive Water Plan Study Committee*, August, 2002