

NUTRIENT TRADING: UNDERSTANDING THE POLICY AND WATER QUALITY IMPLICATIONS

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Water quality trading is a market-based policy tool that is intended to bring increased flexibility and cost savings to wastewater management. It is being actively promoted by federal agencies including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and it is currently included in the draft statewide water management plan for Georgia. Water quality trading is a complex policy tool that raises questions that are both technical and policy oriented. This session will consider the policy questions raised by the possible use of water quality trading in Georgia watersheds. (Another session, in the water quality track, considers more technical questions.) The panelists include:

- 1) Todd Rasmussen, Warnell School of Forest Resources, University of Georgia: Dr. Rasmussen has been involved in research and outreach projects concerning the potential use of water quality trading in Georgia.
- 2) Curt Fehn, Environmental Protection Agency Region IV: Mr. Fehn is a regional leader in the Southeast on water quality trading for the EPA.
- 3) Rich Gannon, North Carolina Division of Water Quality: As an official in the North Carolina regulatory agency responsible for water quality, Mr. Gannon is involved in the implementation of several nutrient trading programs in North Carolina.
- 4) Heather Jacobs, Pamlico-Tar River Foundation (NC): Ms. Jacobs works with an environmental advocacy organization that was a party involved in the development of the first nutrient trading program in North Carolina.

The panel will be moderated by Kristin Rowles from the Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center. Ms. Rowles has been involved in research on the potential application of water quality trading in Georgia for several years and worked with water quality trading programs in North Carolina and New York.

This panel discussion comes at an important time when Georgia is considering how it might adopt water quality trading as a water resource management strategy. The current draft statewide water management plan includes water quality trading as a policy option. With no

water quality trading programs currently in place, Georgia lags behind many other states in implementing this policy option. However, at recent Town Hall meetings where stakeholder input was collected on the draft statewide water management plan, several stakeholder organizations voiced concerns about nutrient trading. This panel is intended to provide an opportunity to discuss the benefits and costs of the possible implementation of water quality trading in Georgia.

By bringing in two panelists from North Carolina, we hope to learn from those with several years of experience with implementation of water quality trading. While North Carolina regulators have generally favored expanding the use of water quality trading in the state, the panelists will also discuss concerns with implementation.

When considering complex environmental management issues, informed debate is central to finding workable solutions. As Georgia considers whether to include water quality trading in its policy toolbox, this panel is an opportunity to promote an informed debate about this important topic.