

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (Metro Water District) was created by the Georgia General Assembly in 2001 (O.C.G.A. §12-5-572) to serve as the water planning organization for the greater metropolitan Atlanta area. The Metro Water District's purpose is to establish policy, create plans and promote intergovernmental coordination of water issues in the District from a regional perspective.

The Metro Water District includes 15 counties (Bartow, Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Forsyth, Gwinnett, Hall, Henry, Paulding, and Rockdale counties) as well as 91 municipalities partially or fully within these counties. The Metro Water District also has seven authorities which provide water, sewer and/or stormwater services. The Metro Water District's plans and policies work to protect water resources in the Chattahoochee, Coosa, Flint, Ocmulgee, Oconee and Tallapoosa River Basins.

With the adoption of the Georgia State-wide Water Management Plan by the Georgia General Assembly in 2008, the Metro Water District is now one of eleven regional water planning councils in the state, and will continue to work within the integrated framework of state water resources planning.

The Metro Water District enabling legislation mandated the development of three long-term regional plans to address the metropolitan area's water resources challenges:

- Water Supply and Water Conservation Management Plan
- Wastewater Management Plan
- Watershed Management Plan

The first plans were completed and adopted in 2003 and have been actively implemented by local jurisdictions in the Metro Water District.

This document serves as the first update to the original Watershed Management Plan and details strategies and recommendations for both effective watershed and stormwater management and water quality protection. It includes specific tasks and milestones for implementing these recommendations for local governments as well as regional and state agencies.

THE PLAN UPDATE PROCESS

The Metro Water District utilized an integrated planning effort for the plan updates similar to that used to develop the original plans in order to build consensus for long-term regional water resources management solutions. The Metro Water District water resources plans are the result of a collaborative effort between the Metro Water District's local jurisdictions, the Georgia EPD, and numerous stakeholders.

As envisioned by the Metro Water District's enabling legislation, the planning process includes the Metro Water District Governing Board, a Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), six Basin Advisory Councils (BAC), Georgia EPD, planning staff from the Atlanta Regional Commission and technical consulting firms.

INTEGRATION OF PLANNING EFFORTS

The Metro Water District also prepared two other plan updates which together with the Watershed Management Plan represent an integrated and holistic approach to water resources planning and management. The **Water Supply and Water Conservation Management Plan** provides the framework for meeting local water supply demands over its planning horizon. It calls for intensive water demand management and an aggressive water conservation program. The plan includes recommended supply sources and facilities for the Metro Water District, as well as the interim sizing of water treatment plants required to meet local demands. The **Wastewater Management Plan** sets forth strategies for comprehensive wastewater management efforts to meet future needs across the Metro Water District. The plan outlines a long-term implementation schedule for public wastewater treatment. It also provides for comprehensive wastewater planning to establish future sewer service areas and calls for more intensive management of privately owned septic systems.

KEY CHANGES TO THE PLAN

In this plan update, there are a number of changes from the original 2003 Watershed Management Plan, including a substantial reorganization of the document. The most notable change involved consolidating all of the required local management measures into a single section (Section 5) and providing more background, implementation guidance and resources than were included in the 2003 document. In addition, the measures were placed into functional categories to make it easier to determine which personnel or department has responsibility for implementation.

Based on implementation experiences with the 2003 Watershed Management Plan, the local management measures were rewritten and formatted to provide more background, implementation guidance and resources for local programs. Another major change is the preparation of a set of additional optional measures (Section 6). The implementation section was also revisited and now provides simple, one-page implementation summaries for each responsible entity.

RATIONALE FOR WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

The Metro Water District is faced with a number of water resources challenges which reinforce the need for active watershed management efforts, including:

- Mitigating the water quality and quantity impacts resulting from increased stormwater runoff associated with land use changes;
- Protecting drinking water supply sources within and downstream of the Metro Water District;
- Ensuring adequate assimilative capacity for wastewater discharges to support future growth projections;
- Addressing over 1,500 miles of rivers and streams in the Metro Water District that fail to meet State water quality standards, primarily due to the effects of stormwater runoff and nonpoint source pollution;

- Improving water quality in the major lakes inside and just downstream of the Metro Water District which serve as a recreation destination for millions of visitors and generate billions of dollars for the local economy;
- Protecting aquatic health and habitat in the Metro Water District, including threatened and endangered species;
- Educating the region’s growing population on the need for good stewardship of our limited water resources;
- Managing and maintaining public stormwater infrastructure; and
- Need for a regional approach to stormwater and watershed management.

FEDERAL AND STATE REGULATIONS

The District-wide Watershed Management Plan builds upon the existing watershed planning efforts being undertaken by local jurisdictions. Many of these efforts are the result of a number of Federal and State regulations related to watershed and water quality protection. These laws and programs, including new and revised regulations since the 2003 Plan, were reviewed and taken into account during the development of the local management measures in this plan, including:

- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for municipal stormwater and wastewater, industrial stormwater and wastewater, and construction stormwater
- Water Quality and Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) provision of the Clean Water Act
- Wetland Protection regulations (Section 404 permits)
- Federal Safe Drinking Water Act requirements
- National Flood Insurance Act and National Dam Safety Program
- Federal Endangered Species Act
- Related State of Georgia regulations including Watershed Assessment & Protection Plan requirements, Georgia Erosion & Sedimentation Control Act, Metro River Protection Act, Georgia Planning Act, and Comprehensive State-wide Water Management Plan (State Water Plan).

BASIN SPECIFIC PROFILES

The Metro Water District lies within six major river basins: the Chattahoochee, Coosa, Flint, Ocmulgee, Oconee and Tallapoosa River watersheds. Basin specific profiles are provided for each of the river basins within the Metro Water District which highlight their unique watershed characteristics and challenges, including geography, hydrology, current and future projected land use, drinking water supply, water quality conditions, management issues and recommendations, and success stories. Addressing these challenges is another important driver for the measures and policies provided in the Plan.

LOCAL MANAGEMENT MEASURES

The local management measures are the activities to be performed at the local level by the Metro Water District's member local governments. These include a suite of model stormwater and watershed protection ordinances, jurisdiction-wide watershed planning programs, development review oversight actions, asset management activities, pollution prevention programs, watershed conditions assessment and monitoring, education and public awareness activities, and watershed management efforts specific to certain watersheds, such as water supply watersheds and impaired waters. Some of these measures will require intra-local and/or inter-jurisdictional coordination and cooperation.

The local management measures form a comprehensive program for addressing watershed issues within the Metro Water District, including the protection of water quality and designated uses as well as improving the health of impacted waterbodies. Through the Georgia EPD audit process, local jurisdictions will be held accountable for implementation of these local management measures.

Starting with the foundation of the 2003 Watershed Management Plan, the plan update process focused on adapting the original plan's management measures to better help local governments to address their watershed management needs and goals, regulatory requirements, and the basin-specific issues and priorities.

Each local measure was rewritten and formatted to provide more background, implementation guidance and resources for local programs. A number of local management measures were clarified and some new measures were added to the Plan to address gaps from the original plan. The local management measures are organized into functional categories to facilitate implementation and inter-departmental coordination within a local jurisdiction.

Another major change is the preparation of a set of additional optional measures which are intended to be a resource for additional watershed management efforts at the local level. The optional section provides a strong emphasis on land use planning aspects that can benefit watershed health.

STATE AND REGIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

State and regional policy recommendations are provided to further implementation of watershed management and water resources protection in the Metro Water District. These recommendations are intended for state and regional agencies, and require no action on the part of local governments. Implementation of these policy recommendations are intended to advance the progress towards protecting and improving watershed health within the Metro Water District including:

- Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) compliance with the NPDES MS4 permit program
- Consider guidance for local government programs to manage fertilizer related to lawn use in watersheds where phosphorus loading is an issue
- Consideration of recommendations for bacteria standards and guidance
- Coordination of comprehensive land use planning efforts
- Septic system planning and coordination

- Streamlining of Georgia EPD reporting requirements for watershed-related permits and programs
- Updating the Georgia Stormwater Management Manual

EDUCATION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

Education and public awareness is essential to effective water resources management. This Plan includes a detailed education and awareness program specifically designed to:

- Raise public awareness of water issues and needs to foster support for solutions;
- Educate the public and other identified target groups in order to increase awareness and encourage behavioral changes; and
- Coordinate with other public as well as private entities to maximize the visibility of the Metro Water District and its messages.

The Metro Water District education and public awareness program is comprised of two elements: a regional program managed by the Metro Water District staff; and education activities undertaken by local governments. The Metro Water District provides a regional education and public awareness program, the *Clean Water Campaign*, which develops mass media content and educational tools, including a comprehensive website, brochures and presentation materials. The local governments' role in education and public awareness is to reach out to specific groups in their community, provide educational materials and share knowledge of subject matters with the public by undertaking specific education and outreach activities.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The Watershed Management Plan provides implementation guidance and schedules for the management measures and actions included in the Plan. Local jurisdictions have a high level of accountability for implementing the Watershed Management Plan's local management measures through the Georgia EPD audit process. Georgia EPD auditors conduct a thorough review of the local programs and procedures to determine consistency with the Metro Water District Water Supply and Water Conservation Management Plan. Communities must substantially comply with the Metro Water District plan provisions in order to modify or obtain new water withdrawal permits, wasteload allocations, GEFA loan funding, or the renewal of MS4 stormwater permits. Overall, this system has worked well to ensure implementation of the provisions of all three Metro Water District water resources plans.

COSTS AND FUNDING

Costs for the implementation of the Plan's required local management measures were estimated based upon a combination of technical literature review and actual expenditures provided by local governments.

Successful implementation of the Plan's watershed management activities will require adequate program funding. There are two primary funding methods available to local governments, general appropriations (general fund) and stormwater user fees. In addition, there are a number of supplemental sources of funding, including loans, bonds, service fees and grants. A blend of funding methods is recommended for most local governments.

FUTURE PLAN EVALUATION

The Metro Water District enabling legislation identifies the need to periodically assess regional progress toward implementation of the specific actions identified in the Watershed Management Plan and toward meeting the long-term goal of comprehensive water resources management. The Metro Water District conducts an annual survey that reports on the progress of implementation of the local management measures within this Plan. The Metro Water District summarizes the survey results in their annual report.

There are two types of plan reviews and updates: annual reviews and plan updates that occur every five years. The reviews and updates are an important component of an adaptive management approach for all three of the Metro Water District's long-term management Plans (water supply and conservation, wastewater, and watershed).