

Coastal Georgia Regional Water Planning Council

Public Involvement Plan

This document summarizes the Public Involvement Plan which will guide public involvement activities of the Coastal Georgia Regional Water Planning Council (Council). This Plan establishes the public involvement activities that will be undertaken by the Council.

The Chair of the Council will use discretion in permitting additional public comment or adjusting to adapt to specific meeting timelines and constraints, so long as the intent and expectations described below are followed.

During the regional planning process the Council, with assistance from their regional planning contractors, will implement this Public Involvement Plan to provide opportunities for meaningful input from key stakeholders, the members of local government advisory body, and the general public.

Guiding principles

The Coastal Georgia Council recognizes the benefit and importance of providing opportunities for diverse input throughout the regional water planning process. The principles of the public input process are:

- Stakeholders and regional water planning council members will treat each other with respect and dignity.
- All participants will have an open mind and participate openly and honestly.
- The regional water planning process will continue with concurrent public comment throughout.
- Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) will provide public notice and take public comment on draft regional water plans after they are submitted.
- Stakeholder comments will be pertinent to the topic of the meeting at which they are expressed.
- Input from the public, key stakeholders, and the members of the Local Government Advisory Body will be considered and incorporated in regional water planning council work products.

Key stakeholders

The key stakeholders for the Coastal Georgia water planning region are identified below. All members of the public will have opportunities for input, even if not specifically identified in this section.

- Agriculture – includes water permit holders for agricultural applications.
- Businesses – includes local businesses.
- Environment – includes citizens, agencies, and groups focused on environmental protection.
- Forestry – includes owners of managed forest lands and the forest products industry.
- Industries – includes industrial water permit holders and municipally-supplied industrial facilities.

Public Involvement Plan

- Institutions/educational/schools – includes public and private schools as well as institutions.
- Local government officials – includes one representative from each city and county within the water planning region.
- Military and Federal – includes military bases and other large Federal facilities within the water planning region.
- Neighboring regional water planning councils – water planning councils that share borders and/or water resources.
- Public – any citizen interested in the regional water planning process.
- Recreation – includes citizens and industry related to recreational water uses.
- Regional Commissions – agencies supporting local and regional comprehensive planning.
- Tourism – includes public and private organizations related to local travel and tourism.
- Other large water users – includes other large water users identified in the water planning region, including government entities.

Procedural criteria

Time will be provided at each Council meeting to allow for input from stakeholders and the public. The procedural criteria outlined here are intended to ensure the public respects the regional water planning council's schedule constraints and the regional water planning council respects the public's opportunity to present relevant and different opinions. To facilitate a fair and efficient process, the Coastal Georgia Council has adopted the following procedures for public comment.

- All full regional water planning council meetings will be open meetings.
- Stakeholders will be provided an opportunity to provide comments pertinent to the topic of the meeting in which they are expressed.
- Time will be provided at the end of all Coastal Georgia Council meetings.
- Provisions for written comments will be made at all Coastal Georgia Council meetings.

The Chair of the Coastal Georgia Council will use discretion to manage public comment under different circumstances in ways that enable the Council to progress with its work and respect those who want to comment.

Council members will be encouraged to coordinate inquiries and/or reports out to the media with EPD and/or the chair of the Coastal Georgia Council.

Meeting announcements

All regional water planning council meetings will be open meetings, including at least a 24-hour notice of any meetings. The following provisions will be made for all planning council meetings to inform the public of upcoming meetings.

- Posted on the Coastal Georgia regional water planning council website (<http://www.coastalgeorgiacouncil.org>) with a meeting agenda or summary of topics to be covered, meeting time, and meeting address.
- Posted at the meeting location with a meeting agenda or summary of topics to be covered, meeting time, and meeting address.
- Meeting summaries will be posted on the Coastal Georgia regional water planning council website.

Stakeholder and public comment opportunities

Specific opportunities during the regional water planning process for stakeholder and public input include but are not limited to the following:

- Meetings of the Coastal Georgia regional water planning council.
- Coastal Georgia regional water planning council website (documents will be posted periodically with timeframes for comment and mechanisms for comment clearly stated).
- Letters may be mailed to EPD.
- Emails to the regional water planning council and/or EPD.
- EPD public notice period for the resource assessments.
- EPD public notice period on the draft regional water plans.

Local government officials

Much of the implementation of the regional water plans is the responsibility of local governments; therefore input will be sought from the local government officials on the following specific topics.

- Regional population and employment forecasts.
- Fiscal implications of water management practices.
- Draft regional water plan.

The Coastal Georgia Council and local government officials should identify proper communication pathways. The following actions are intended to coordinate activities of the local government officials with the Council.

Public Involvement Plan

- Local government officials will be provided an opportunity at the end of the Council meetings to comment on the regional water planning process and items on the meeting agenda.
- Local government officials may provide written comments to the Council, as needed.
- Meeting notices, relevant Council materials, and other necessary coordination will in part be accomplished via leadership and local government membership of Georgia Municipal Association, and the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia.

Other regional water planning councils

In order to plan and coordinate the use and protection of shared water resources, the Coastal Georgia Council will coordinate with adjacent and hydrologically-connected councils throughout the regional water planning process. EPD will convene some meetings to discuss shared water resources, such as on the current resource assessments. The Coastal Georgia Councils will use the following communication pathways to coordinate with adjacent regional water planning councils.

- Members of the Coastal Georgia Council will attend shared resource meetings and other joint meetings.
- At the discretion of the Chair, an opportunity may be provided at Council meetings for announcements or progress reports from adjacent regional water planning councils.

The Chair of the Coastal Georgia Councils may use their discretion to provide additional coordination with adjacent regional water planning councils, as deemed appropriate.

Review and consideration of public input

The objective of this process is to gather relevant and diverse input to improve the quality of the recommended regional water plans. Written comments and web comments will be summarized and provided to the regional water planning council members. Public comments given at Council meetings will be summarized and included in meeting summaries. Once public comments are received from the public and key stakeholders the Coastal Georgia Council, with the assistance of the regional planning contractor, will consider and as appropriate provide responses to public comments.