METRO ATLANTA WATER PLANNING DISTRICT

OBJECTIVE

- Watershed-based, regional planning for water resources and improvement of water quality

CREATION

- The **Metro Atlanta Water Planning District** ("the District") should be created through legislation setting out the following:

ROLE

- Policy, planning and intergovernmental coordination for regional stormwater, wastewater and water supply management
- Facilitate multi-jurisdictional projects and enhance access to funding
- This is a planning district -- not an enforcement or regulatory authority. Enforcement should primarily rest with the State EPD through water-related permits and other regulatory authority as described below

SUMMARY OF RESPONSIBILITIES

- Develop **regional and watershed-specific plans** covering wastewater and stormwater management, water supply and conservation
- Review existing plans and ordinances and develop **regionally consistent policies, model ordinances and minimum standards of performance**
- Coordinate an effective regional **water quality monitoring program and database** among local, state and federal agencies
- Develop regional **water conservation** strategy and programs
  Develop **measurable** short-term and long-term **goals** for water quality and conservation improvement
- Establish water-related **education programs** and support the efforts of **community watershed groups**

A further description of the content of the District plans is contained on page 3

ORGANIZATION

- **Governing board** should be comprised of 35 local elected officials, citizens, business, technical, and conservation members

Local Officials: 19 --- Local officials to decide appropriate representation of commissioners and mayors (or their designees) from the relevant jurisdictions

Citizen representatives: 16 --- Citizen, Business, Conservation, Technical, Academic

*Appointment of citizen reps suggested as follows: Governor (4 appointments); separate caucus of state senators and house members from District (**6 each** from House and Senate ---3 majority and 3 minority appointments)*

- **Executive Committee** from the District should be reflective of the ratio of the public-private composition of the board. The Chair should have term limits

- **Staff** -- should build on the existing ARC staff, and hire additional employees as needed. This dedicated staff will also manage outside contractors as needed for plan development

- **Technical Coordinating Committee** should consist primarily of water and wastewater officials from counties, cities and authorities in the District. Subcommittees would provide additional support for specific areas and issues such as water treatment, wastewater treatment and stormwater

  Their role would be to provide technical expertise and to assist the staff of the District in addressing technical and implementation issues

- **Basin Advisory Councils** — should be created for each of the major basins in the District (Chattahoochee, Etowah, Flint and Qcmulgee). Each Basin Advisory Council would consist of a minimum of 20 stakeholders from the District, as well as committed representatives from upstream and downstream (outside the District). Membership on the Councils should be inclusive of diverse viewpoints and perspective. The work of these councils would include:

  - Guiding policy development and implementation
  - Making certain that the critical issues of the watershed! sub-basin are understood
  - Input to EPD and the DNR in the development of minimum criteria for the plans
  - Working with the District on the content of the watershed! sub-basin plans as these plans are developed
  - Providing written comments on proposed plans before they are submitted for public hearings or approval, and having advance notice and opportunity to comment on water-related permit expansions and modifications

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

- The District will initially consist of **16 counties** (Bartow, Clayton, Cherokee, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Hall, Henry, Newton, Paulding, Rockdale, and Walton), the **City of Atlanta** and all other municipalities within these counties

- Legislation should provide a mechanism where:

  - the District can be enlarged and neighboring counties to the District can join voluntarily, and

  - different districts can be created in other geographic regions of the State in the future based upon their particular water needs

ELEMENTS OF REGIONAL AND WATERSHED PLANS

THE DISTRICT WATER PLANS SHOULD CONTAIN THE FOLLOWING ELEMENT

- Monitoring to assess and inventory existing problems
- Forecasting future pollutant loads
- Setting priorities based upon the most important water resource needs/goals for watershed
- Developing effective control programs to improve water quality and comply with TMDLs
- Plans for implementation of appropriate controls, county-by-county
- Monitoring of plan, with benchmarks and performance measures to gauge progress
- Annual reports showing progress towards goals

STORM WATER MANAGEMENT

Within one year:

- Model Stormwater Ordinance and plan for region-wide adoption

Within two years:

- Minimum standards for development (new construction) and redevelopment (retrofitting)
- Model ordinances and minimum program requirements for local governments regarding stormwater management, erosion control and resource protection
- Description of current conflicts between regional and watershed plans and existing plans/ordinances/activities of local governments
  - review sub-watershed plans for consistency with regional and watershed plans
- Program to identify and implement structural controls (ponds, swales) and non-structural controls (better site design/impervious surface limits) needed to achieve goals
- Guidance for meeting TMDL requirements
- Program and process for adopting ordinances and other legal mechanisms for implementing controls and best management practices

WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT

Within one year:

- Short-term plan to increase wastewater treatment capacity as necessary to ease immediate capacity constraints and prospect of sewer tap moratoriums

Within two years:

- Long-term (20 year) regional wastewater management plan to include:
  - develop a regional plan for future upgrades and expansions
  - allow for economies of scale and avoid unnecessary costs
  - take advantage of existing efficiencies
  - reduce duplication of efforts
  - analysis of regional and cross-jurisdictional approaches

- timetable and description of which plants will be phased-out, which will be expanded and upgraded
- minimum level of upgrades to be undertaken

- Plan for inspection and maintenance of septic tanks in critical areas, and means by which to discourage growth on septic tanks
- Develop plans for gray-water re-use and explore other technologies that may be applicable

WATER SUPPLY/CONSERVATION:

The District will also develop appropriate plans for water supply and implement conservation programs to reduce per capita water consumption

REVIEW, IMPLEMENTATION, AND ENFORCEMENT

REVIEW

- The **Board of The Department of Natural Resources should, through rulemaking, review and approve the minimum criteria and District plans** at a regularly scheduled public Board meeting, preceded by public notice
- **Public hearings** should be held at appropriate times during development of the plan and public comments encouraged during the planning process
- **Basin Advisory Councils** should also have the opportunity for **prior review** and **comment** on applications for permit expansions an modifications in their respective basins
- The District should **communicate progress through annual reports** filed with the Governor, members of the General Assembly and the Department of Natural Resources. Annual reports will track the District's performance relative to annual measurable goals and will be accessible to the public

IMPLEMENTATION OF WATER PLANS

- Once plans are written and approved, local governments in the District will be responsible for implementation of the plans

ENFORCEMENT AND INCENTIVES

- Enforcement of the District plan should be tied to **EPD water-related permits** and additional enforcement as described further below in the next section
- State water-related **grants and loans** should only be available to local governments implementing the District plan
- **State matching grant program** should be available for cross-jurisdictional projects consistent with the District Plan

ROLE OF STATE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION DIVISION

RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Establish minimum criteria** for the District's plans with a basin-wide, state level perspective. These criteria will be approved by the DNR board as described above
- **Completeness review** of the District plans
- **Submit the District Plan for DNR Board approval** if complete and consistent with minimum criteria
- **Allocate future wastewater capacity** through a planned approach based upon recommendations from the Planning District
- **Enforce compliance** with regional water quality plans. If a jurisdiction fails to implement the District's plans, the EPD will:
    - Deny water-related growth permits (expansions of existing discharge or withdrawal permits or new permits) within that jurisdiction;
    - Deny additional sewer taps/water connections within that jurisdiction; and
    - Take enforcement action through fines or other appropriate means through other water-related permits

Plans will be required to be implemented county/city-wide, not just in service delivery areas

LEGISLATION

EPD's responsibilities and authority as described above will be set forth by statute

STAFF

EPD's efforts must be supported by additional staff and resources necessary to carry out its responsibilities outlined above

OPERATIONAL AND IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING

Operational Funding (for the planning work of the District)

- **Initial one-time planning grant** will be sought from the State
- **Annual operational funding (approximately $3M) should be shared by the local governments and the State on an equal basis.** Local government members would implement an assessment based upon population or water use
- Explore use of **permit fees and** fines as additional funding for the operation of EPD (State legislation required)

Implementation Funding (for the projects to be undertaken)

Funding of projects to implement the regional plan (stormwater controls, upgrades and expansion of water and wastewater treatment facilities, etc.) will continue to be the responsibility of local governments. These efforts will be supplemented through requested funding as follows:

- **$2 B Clean Water Loan/Bond fund** would be created to make low-interest loans available to local governments for projects consistent with the regional plan. This fund would be phased-in over four years, and would be available to local governments in Georgia who create a regional water quality plan similar to the plan described above and seek funding for projects consistent with that plan

- Explore other incentives for cross-jurisdictional projects through state and federal matching funds

- **Federal appropriations:** There must be a well-coordinated and insistent push for Georgia and the Atlanta region to receive an equitable share of federal appropriations. Mobilize national delegation to seek direct federal appropriations for regional stormwater, wastewater and related projects

- District would also facilitate securing funding for multi-jurisdictional projects

SOLUTIONS

The Clean Water Initiative Task Force has focused its efforts on the region's challenges related to TMDLs, stormwater and wastewater. To address these challenges the Task Force has identified solutions that the region as a whole should pursue. The following section outlines the solutions needed for our region. These specific actions should be pursued by the newly created Metro Atlanta Water Planning District ("the District"), and other groups such as the EPD, local governments and community groups, as appropriate.

WATER QUALITY STANDARDS

1. *As our region grows, we will strive to improve our overall water quality so that all of our waters are fishable and swimmable*

   a. Where state water quality standards may not be attainable (e.g., fecal coliform), we will reduce levels of these pollutants to the maximum extent practical, and work for the establishment of a proper and meaningful standard
   b. Where no state water quality standards exist for water quality problems that are well recognized (e.g., sediment levels and stream bed scouring), we will take steps to reduce these problems recognizing their significance despite the absence of state standards. We will also work towards the establishment of a useful and accepted standard for these problems

TMDL COORDINATION

2. *With the EPD, the District should work to engage relevant public and private sector stakeholders in the process of developing and implementing TMDLs*

   a. EPD to conduct water quality monitoring in conjunction with TMDL schedule, targeting list of "impaired waters" to determine if any can be removed from list prior to development of TMDLs; coordination of efforts facilitated by the District
   b. EPD and the District to work together to coordinate effective review and comment on TMDLs as they are developed. Ensure that stormwater and wastewater management plans are coordinated with the TMDL implementation plans
   c. EPD and the District will also work together to identify impaired waters that are not currently listed

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

3. *The District to consolidate the* 2] *existing and ongoing watershed assessments in order to create consistent plans for the 4 major watersheds in our region*

4. *As soon as possible EPD and the District should work to expand water quality monitoring and data gathering necessary to develop, implement and evaluate effective stormwater management strategies*

a. Based upon sound scientific evaluation, EPD should:
    i. Determine number of monitoring sites needed for effective decision making
    ii. Increase the frequency of monitoring (wet weather, dry weather, seasonal)
    iii. Implement continuous in-stream monitoring where needed
    iv. Expand monitoring to include chemical, biological and physical sampling
c. EPD and other vested parties should pursue the implementation of U.S. Geological Survey's Chattahoochee Monitoring Proposal ($6.9M over 4 years), and work to develop similar proposals for the other sub-basins
d. The staff and funding of EPD should be increased to effectively execute water quality monitoring goals
e. THE DISTRICT should help coordinate efforts of local governments, federal agencies, citizens, academics and environmental groups already collecting data

5. *The District responsibilities to include development of public education programs to create awareness, shape public attitudes, and drive behavior change*

a. Develop public awareness needed to support stormwater programs
b. Develop public pride and sense of ownership in preserving our water resources
c. Encourage public behavior changes that benefit water quality (e.g. usage of environmentally friendly fertilizers, proper paint disposal techniques, etc.)

6. *The District plans should call for the implementation of stormwater education programs with goal of reaching 75-90% of the population within 5 years*

a. Local governments to introduce water education courses into existing curriculum for grades K- 12 in all public schools
b. District to implement region-wide public education campaign using print media, television and community outreach

7. *The District, EPD and local governments should help promote and support community, watershed and adopt-a-river/stream programs*

8. *EPD should enforce existing erosion and sedimentation control laws, review monitoring reports and ensure that all construction sites are inspected on regular basis (by 2003)*

a. Create/supplement a focused staff within EPD to review NPDES construction site monitoring reports and ensure that best management practices are in place (applies to sites of 5 acres or more)
b. Local governments required to have adequate staff for regular site monitoring at local government level and enforcement of existing erosion and sedimentation laws (applies to all construction sites)
c. Establish clear lines of authority and responsibility between local government staff and Soil and Water Conservation Districts as it relates to land disturbance permits and enforcement of existing erosion laws

9. *The District plans should require educational programs for contractors/builders regarding best management practices across the region*

10. *Within 2 years, the District should create and local governments adopt common set of model design practices for new development and redevelopment across all counties throughout the region/watershed*

    a. Strive for simple stormwater management solutions based upon natural systems and good design (e.g., ponds, swales, buffers, stormwater treatment and re-use)
    b. Adopt common set of minimum best management practices across all jurisdictions (such as the ARC stormwater manual)

11. *The District plans should directly tie land-use planning decisions to water qual ity protection; plans should include provisions for:*

    a. Expansion of stream buffers beyond state requirement of *25* feet where supported by good science and needed to protect water quality
    b. Assurance that existing development regulations and zoning ordinances benefit water quality
    c. Establishment of impervious surface limitations where appropriate
    d. Enforcement of existing stream buffer ordinances and minimize variances
    e. Land acquisition for water quality should be promoted through Governor's Greenspace Initiative

12. *The District plans should direct local governments to maintain and retrofit existing problem areas*

    a. Storm drains: Invest in maintenance and upkeep programs so that all storm drains and conveyance systems are kept updated and working properly
    b. Holding areas/ponds/swales: Create stormwater management systems to naturally filter stormwater in already developed areas
    c. Buffers/streambanks: Construct/repair/restore vegetative riparian buffers and stream bank stabilization
    d. Septic tanks: Create a plan to ensure septic tank owners pump their systems every *5* years in accordance with the design specifications. (Look at Douglas County's successful, cost effective program)

WASTE WATER MANAGEMENT

13. *The District should develop and local governments implement regional plan to most cost-effectively upgrade facilities to at least "Level 1" technology (or close facilities too small to cost-effectively upgrade) and expand treatment capacity*

    a. Peer review of the EPD River Model to be completed within 6 months to confirm the level of wastewater treatment upgrades needed
    b. Conduct further analysis to determine what level of wastewater treatment upgrade is most cost-effective at each facility and where money will be best spent
    c. Determine most equitable and beneficial way to implement upgrades (e.g., wading)
    d. Implement upgrade plans throughout the region
    e. Conduct analysis necessary to determine most cost-effective plans for expansions across the region to build on economies of scale, technology, and other advantages
    f. Develop plan to equitably share the cost burden if expansions are consolidated
    g. Develop fair allocation of future capacity to local jurisdictions

14. *The District plan for wastewater management should include plans to use existing systems more efficiently in order to serve additional population of2O-30% without increasing wastewater discharges*

    a. Implement conservation programs to reduce per capita water consumption
    b. Develop re-use systems to reduce wastewater discharges
    c. Reduce infiltration and inflow throughout systems
    d. Use seasonal permits as means to manage wet weather conditions

15. *The District plans and EPD policies should promote wastewater strategies that return as much water as possible to our surface waters*

    a. Septic systems only to be used where not practical to provide sewerage service
    b. Land application without re-use only to be used on limited basis in the future