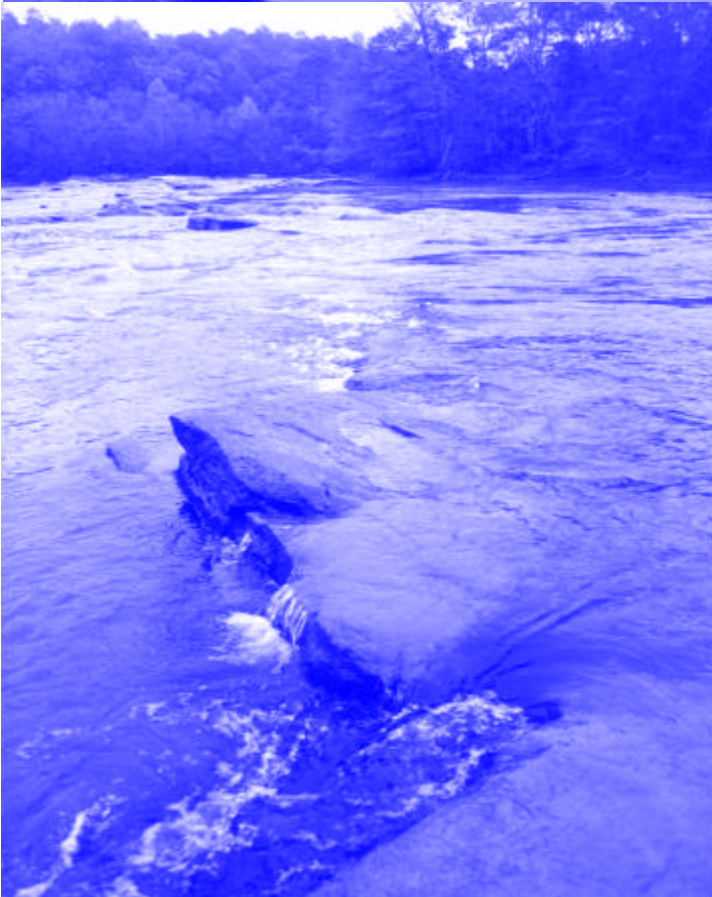


# Georgia Water Resource Policy



**A Call for Action**



Association County Commissioners of Georgia  
and the  
Georgia Municipal Association



---

### **The Association County Commissioners of Georgia**

50 Hurt Plaza, Suite 1000  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303  
(404) 522-5022 Fax: (404)525-2477  
www.accg.org

ACCG is a nonprofit instrumentality of county governments, founded in 1914, whose membership consists of all 159 Georgia counties.

The mission of the association is to develop and maintain an organizational structure within which ideas can be presented and a policy platform developed, enabling all 159 Georgia counties to speak with a unified voice in the public policy arena.

ACCG provides county governments with a framework for ongoing idea exchange with other counties, governments, business and academia, and for obtaining expert advice.

George W. "Bubba" Bird, III,  
Candler County  
*President*

Jerry R. Griffin  
*Executive Director*

### **The Georgia Municipal Association**

201 Pryor Street, SW  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303  
(404) 688-0472  
www.gmanet.com

Founded in 1934, GMA is a voluntary, non-profit corporation representing 477 cities in Georgia. GMA provides legislative advocacy, educational, employee benefit and technical consulting services.

The mission of the association is to anticipate and influence the forces shaping Georgia's communities and to provide leadership, tools and services that assist local governments in becoming more innovative, effective and responsive.

Evelyn Turner  
Columbus  
*President*

James A. Calvin  
*Executive Director*

---

---

# Georgia Water Resource Policy

## A Call for Action

**December 1999**

**A**s Georgia's economic and population growth continue to increase demands being placed on our finite water resources, local government officials have realized how crucial water is to their communities' economy and environmental health. In addition, this year's drought has underscored the fact that water is vital to our very existence and that significant actions are needed to ensure that we steward rather than squander this most precious resource. As stated by Dr. Jim Kundell, Professor and Hill Distinguished Fellow, The University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government:

**It will take considerable planning and research, discussion and action to understand and resolve the water-related challenges and issues facing Georgia. We must have our sights set on a clear vision for the year 2020. We must decide where we want to be at that time and determine what it will take to get there. Then we need to put in place those mechanisms that will enable us to reach our vision.**

The need for cities and counties to address Georgia's water challenges in a proactive and comprehensive manner has also been voiced by city and county leaders around the state.

**Planning too often has been a process that we either have a tendency to delay beginning, or one where the urgency of the hour impedes the implementation. Barriers relating to resources of time or money, or those relating to knowledge or political will, can overtake what is good and right and prevent the right visions from becoming reality. We must not let that happen. We must be resolved – be determined – that the vision for Georgia two decades hence will not be destroyed or even blurred when it comes to making sure our water resources are adequate and protected. Anything less will say to that generation that we failed.**

**Sherrill Stafford**

*Chairman, Houston County*

*Co-Chairman, Georgia Water Management Campaign*

**We realize, more than ever, that we have different problems in different parts of the state. It is very important for us to find the best means for responsible stewardship of this precious commodity called water. And it must be done with the idea of what is best for the state as a whole.**

**Haines Hill**

*Mayor, Dahlonega*

*Co-Chairman, Georgia Water Management Campaign*

Georgia local government officials have taken these messages to heart and put forth the following water resources agenda for action.

---

## Our vision for the state is that...

...all current and future Georgians have equitable access to a reliable supply of good quality water while ensuring that the resources are protective of public health and environmental quality and supportive of economic development.

---

## Impeding Georgia from reaching this vision, are four key needs.

---

**1 There is a need for a comprehensive and clearly stated water management strategy that is consistently communicated and based on sound data.**

As a state, we have not thoughtfully deliberated what our strategy should be for managing Georgia's water resources. We have water quality and water management policies in place but we do not have a common plan for what we should do or how we should do it. Without such a strategy, we will have a hodgepodge of policies and programs, regulations and requirements, incentives and restrictions that may be wasteful of both fiscal resources and water resources.

**2 There is a need to refine Georgia's water allocation policies.**

Georgia's history as a "wet" state has enabled us to exist with rather loosely defined measures for allocating water to competing uses. As the demands on our water resources have increased, however, the need to tighten these policies and procedures has also increased. This is underscored by conflicts with our neighboring states over shared water resources and in mounting tension within the state between regions, jurisdictions, and those that use water for various purposes.

**3 There is a need to encourage multi-jurisdictional approaches to water management.**

Water does not recognize jurisdictional boundaries; it recognizes river basins, watersheds, and aquifers. Rarely are the boundaries of our cities and counties the same as those for hydrologic units. The result is that we are frequently working at cross purposes with Mother Nature. To better address water realities, a broader, multi-jurisdictional perspective is necessary that will enable us to manage our water resources on a regional and watershed basis.

**4 There is a need to coordinate water resource management and protection efforts with land use planning and management activities.**

The history of our water protection efforts has emphasized technological fixes to protect water quality such as when we treat drinking water and wastewater to meet our water quality standards. No longer is it possible to ensure water quality in just this way. Over half of the pollutants entering our waterways today come from non-point sources (i.e., water flowing over parking lots and roads, construction sites and agricultural fields, lawns and cut-over forest lands). In order to protect water quality, we must increasingly make land use decisions based, in part, on how they will affect our water resources.

---

## To address the key needs, we put forth the following five goals.

---

**1** To have established and clearly communicated water policy, regulatory requirements, and other directives that are consistent, comprehensive, coordinated and adaptive.

**2** To have created an office, which is separate from EPD but which communicates, cooperates and coordinates its activities with EPD and other state agencies and authorities whose decisions affect water protection and management. This office would:

- [a] develop a comprehensive state water resources management plan and coordinate state, regional and local water management planning efforts;
- [b] promote development of regional/alternative water supplies; and
- [c] oversee the refinement of Georgia's water allocation policies and procedures so they:
  - c are clearly stated, consistent and expedited;
  - c are based on a comprehensive water resources management plan developed at the state level, and refined with input from local government officials and other stakeholders;
  - c require allocation requests be justified based on available supply, current and projected population needs, competing demands, economic development goals, conservation, stewardship, instream flow requirements, and term of the permit; and
  - c take into account regional variations and conditions.

There is no desire on the part of local governments to have an additional layer of government added at the state level. ACCG and GMA envision that this office would be responsible for visioning, water resources planning and development, and coordination amongst state and regional entities, while permitting and enforcement authority would remain with EPD.

**3** To have a statewide, centralized, coordinated, and reliable system of comprehensive water-related data and information, which is:

- [a] organized and customized according to watershed boundaries;
- [b] accessible electronically; and
- [c] maintained and updated on an ongoing basis, including inputting new data when it is collected, and incorporating procedures for evaluating the data's quality.

**4** To have state grants, loans and permits used to provide substantive incentives for regionalization based on:

- [a] the recognition that local governments have demonstrated ability to provide services; and
- [b] the realization that additional requirements may be necessary in areas of the state experiencing rapid growth or which are affected by water allocation or availability concerns.

**5** To have instituted state and local policies that result in land use decisions being made and control measures being used in a manner that is protective of and enhances water resources, and which are adaptive to local conditions and needs.

---

## To achieve the goals set forth, we recommend the following actions.

---

**1** The State, in its role as trustee for the people, must act to protect Georgia's water resources. As such, the Governor and General Assembly have a responsibility to ensure that those responsible for managing Georgia's water resources have adequate financial resources to carry out their responsibilities.

**2** EPD should inventory and evaluate existing water-related data and information to:

- [a] determine the adequacy and reliability of existing data and data currently being collected; and
- [b] determine where needed data and information are lacking.

Existing reliable data and information should be converted to compatible and electronic form and placed in a centralized, user-friendly database with provisions for updating it as new data and information become available. To encourage other institutions and organizations to assist in generating reliable water-related data, EPD should establish and publish consistent guidelines to ensure uniformity of data collection and reporting.

**3** In order for all parties to understand the procedures, decision-making process, and the basis upon which decisions will be made, the Board of Natural Resources, in cooperation with EPD, should review EPD's rules to determine whether they provide the regulated community and other interested parties with sufficient guidance and understanding that an objective and clearly stated permit review process will be followed.

**4** The Governor and General Assembly should create and adequately finance an Office of Water Resources, separate from EPD, to:

- [a] develop a comprehensive state water resources management plan and to coordinate state, regional and local water management planning efforts;
- [b] promote and coordinate development of regional/ alternative water supplies;
- [c] oversee the refinement of Georgia's water allocation policies and procedures; and
- [d] coordinate state activities affecting water resources.

Again, water permitting and enforcement authority should remain with EPD while responsibility for visioning and water resources planning should be assigned to the Office of Water Resources.

A commission composed of a broad range of stakeholders should be established to advise the Office of Water Resources in fulfilling its mission. These stakeholders should include representatives of water users, water providers and those whose actions may impact Georgia's water resources as well as representatives of the general public and environmental advocacy organizations.

---

## Recommended Actions ...continued

---

**5** The Governor and General Assembly should encourage and provide incentives for regional water management based on river basin and watershed boundaries and in areas where the availability of water and water demand pressures are most significant. Legislation should be enacted that encourages regionalization for water management purposes that is appropriate to the needs and conditions of a particular area without necessitating the establishment of regional water management institutions where there is no need.

**6** The Governor and the General Assembly should encourage and provide incentives to local governments to tailor their land use plans and land use decision-making policies and programs to be protective of water resources. Amending the Georgia Planning Act of 1989 to more effectively accomplish this aim is called for. In addition, the Governor's Development Council, the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), EPD, and the Office of Water Resources should assist local governments to design their comprehensive plans and land use control measures to protect water resources. The Governor, General Assembly, and state agencies should be supportive of local governments when politically tough land use decisions are made to protect water resources.

**7** EPD, DCA, the Office of Water Resources and other state agencies should establish a public education and awareness program involving a broad base of stakeholders in order to achieve public understanding and support for state, regional and local actions that are necessary to manage and protect Georgia's water resources while providing for future needs.

---

### Concluding thoughts.

---

***“Our community, like most, is experiencing more and more demands on our limited water resources. Demands from residential and industrial usage must be balanced with the protection of the environment. Our greatest challenge is to define that line.”***

**Davis Morgan**

Chairman, Newton County Board  
of Commissioners

Chairman, ACCG Environment & Natural  
Resources Committee

***“Natural hydrology, regional growth patterns, and areas of commercial and industrial activity, not political boundaries, provide the framework for comprehensive and integrated management of water resources. Our actions must be guided by this understanding.”***

**Gerald DeWitt**

Commissioner, City of Jesup

Chairman, GMA Environment & Natural  
Resources Committee

---

**Joint Task Force on Water Resource Policy**  
**Association County Commissioners of Georgia**  
*and the*  
**Georgia Municipal Association**

---

**Co-Chairman**  
**Gerald DeWitt**  
*Commissioner*  
Jesup

**Co-Chairman**  
**Davis Morgan**  
*Chairman*  
Newton County

---

**John Bennett**  
*City Manager*  
Rome

**Wendell Dawson**  
*Chairman*  
Oconee County

**Jimmy Rainwater**  
*Mayor*  
Valdosta

**Joyce Blevins**  
*Chairman*  
McDuffie County

**James C. Dumas, Sr.**  
*Chairman*  
Banks County

**Harry Riggins**  
*Chairman*  
Brantley County

**Joseph Brown**  
*Administrator*  
Liberty County

**Billy Edwards**  
*City Manager*  
Hinesville

**Richard Smith**  
*Councilor*  
Columbus-Muscogee County

**Tommy Coleman**  
*Mayor*  
Albany

**Haines Hill**  
*Mayor*  
Dahlonega

**J. Sherrill Stafford**  
*Chairman*  
Houston County

**Carlyle Cox**  
*City Manager*  
Gainesville

**Harry Jue**  
*Chief, Water & Sewer Bureau*  
Savannah

**Frank Stephens**  
*Deputy Director, Public Utilities*  
Gwinnett County

**Al Crace**  
*Manager*  
Athens-Clarke County

**Brant Keller**  
*Public Works Director*  
Griffin

**Alan Theriault**  
*Administrator*  
Gordon County

**Lamar Crosby**  
*Administrator*  
Effingham County

**Bill Lewis**  
*City Manager*  
Toccoa

**Billy Trapnell**  
*Mayor*  
Metter

**Richard Crowdis**  
*Administrator*  
Dougherty County

**Clair Muller**  
*Council Member*  
Atlanta

**Billy Turner**  
*President*  
Columbus Water Works

