



# Edisto River Basin Council Phase 1 Progress Report

January 2021

## 1.0 Introduction

The South Carolina State Water Planning Framework requires River Basin Councils (RBCs) to prepare and submit progress reports after each phase of the river basin plan development. This progress report covers Phase 1 of the Edisto River Basin planning process spanning June 1, 2020 through January 6, 2021.

The Phase 1 Progress Report summarizes the activities and accomplishments of Phase 1, including key milestones reached, and identifies existing and potential issues regarding schedule and funding. Anticipated challenges as the RBC moves into Phase 2 of the planning process are also identified.

## 2.0 Activities and Accomplishments

### 2.1 RBC Meetings

Nine RBC meetings were held during the Phase 1 planning period. Meetings were held monthly from June through September, then every three weeks thereafter. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all meetings were conducted virtually using the Zoom platform. Meeting durations ranged from 2 to 3 hours.

Between 19 and 22 RBC members attended each meeting. There was a total of 10 unexcused absences. Unexcused absences occur when neither an RBC member nor their alternate are in attendance.

### 2.2 Phase 1 Objectives

The objectives of Phase 1 were to:

- introduce the RBC to the river basin planning process;
- provide technical presentations that inform the RBC members on a range of topics critical to the planning process;
- take field trips to key locations in the river basin;
- establish planning and progress metrics;
- develop a vision statement and planning goals; and
- select a RBC Chair and Vice Chair.

### 2.3 Accomplishments

#### *Information Sharing*

Approximately 20 different technical presentations were delivered during the nine virtual meetings. Presenters included staff representing several divisions within the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), the



U.S. Geological Survey (USGS); the University of South Carolina (USC); The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and CDM Smith. Presentation topics included:

- River Basin Planning and Guiding Principles
- Planning Framework
- RBC Bylaws
- Water Legislation and Permitting
- Basin Hydrology and Monitoring
- Surface Water-Groundwater Connection
- Low Flow Characteristics
- FOIA Rules
- SCDHEC Water Atlas Demo
- Current Water Use
- Water Demand Projections
- Edisto Basin Climatology
- SC Drought Response Act
- Coastal Aquatic Resources
- Freshwater Aquatic Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Water Law
- Surface Water and Groundwater Models
- Environmental Flows/Biological Standards Study

### ***Finalizing Water Demands***

The RBC was informed of the Edisto Basin water demand projections for the business-as-usual and high growth planning scenarios during an initial presentation by SCDNR staff in September. Based on RBC feedback, minor adjustments in the demand projection methodology were made and DNR staff provided updates during October and January RBC meetings. The water demands for both planning scenarios were finalized and provided to CDM Smith for incorporation into the surface water models.

### ***Process and Progress Metrics***

The RBC selected eight process metrics. Process metrics are *benchmarks used to monitor the success or failure of the processes which led to RBC actions*. The selected process metrics are:

1. The process to select RBC members is well documented, transparent, and reflects broad-based outreach.
2. RBCs develop a River Basin Plan within two years of RBC formation.
3. RBC meetings adhere to timelines.
4. River Basin Plans are actionable, logical, and address or prevent challenges with a level of detail to be cost-accountable.

5. Information used and generated during the planning process is shared openly, publicly, and is easily accessible.
6. RBC meeting agendas are focused and promote efficient and productive meetings.
7. RBC members are able to effectively consider, digest, and understand technical information through presentations, discussion, and self-study.
8. Decisions are made using best available scientific, technical, legal or other objective criteria.

The RBC elected to defer selection of progress metrics until later in the planning process, since they primarily relate to implementation of the river basin plan. Progress metrics are *benchmarks used to monitor the success or failure of selected actions taken by an RBC*.

#### ***Mission/Vision Statements and Goal Setting***

Although not required by the planning framework, the RBC elected to develop a mission statement. The Edisto RBC Mission Statement is:

- *To develop, update, and support implementation of a River Basin Plan for sustainable management of water resources in the Edisto.*

The vision statement developed by the RBC is:

- *A resilient and sustainably managed Edisto River Basin where stakeholder and ecosystem needs are recognized, balanced and protected.*

As of the January 6, 2021 meeting, the RBC had developed six planning goals. The RBC elected to re-visit and finalize the goals during the January 27, 2021 meeting. During the January 27<sup>th</sup> meeting, the six goals were simplified and consolidated as follows. The goals were approved by motion.

1. *Develop water use strategies, policies, and legislative recommendations for the Edisto River Basin in order to:*
  - a. *Ensure water resources are maintained to support current and future human and ecosystem needs.*
  - b. *Improve the resiliency of the water resources and help minimize disruptions within the basin.*
  - c. *Promote future development in areas with adequate water resources.*
  - d. *Encourage responsible land use practices.*
2. *Develop and implement a communication plan to promote the strategies, policies and recommendations developed for the Edisto River Basin.*

## 2.4 Activities not Completed

Activities outlined in the Planning Framework for Phase 1 that were not completed included electing the RBC Chair and Vice Chair, conducting field trips, and selecting progress metrics. The RBC decided to postpone electing the RBC leadership positions until in-person meetings were possible. Similarly, the decision was made to postpone field trips until the risk of contracting COVID were reduced. As previously noted, the RBC decided to wait to develop progress metrics until later in the planning process.

## 2.5 Feedback from the RBC

During Phase 1, the RBC members were asked to complete two short surveys during July and December. The surveys were intended to gauge effectiveness of the content and format of the meetings; identify topics that merit discussion and/or technical presentations; evaluate the pace of the planning process; and identify challenges or issues. A summary of the RBC feedback is provided below.

- Most RBC members indicated they can effectively listen and participate in the virtual format. A few noted internet issues or trouble with the Zoom platform when voting.
- Most members approve of 3-hr meetings every three weeks, although several prefer shorter meetings held once a month.
- Most members thought that the information presented in Phase 1 was appropriate and sufficient for them to move to the next phase.
- Most members felt they understand how data and models will be used for planning.
- Most members wanted to wait to elect a Chair and Vice Chair until after the RBC has had the opportunity to meet in person.
- Several members expressed concern that the RBC is not able to interact effectively in the virtual meeting environment or get to know their fellow members and their values and issues.
- Several members expressed concern that the process is moving too fast and is not accomplishing all required for Phase 1.
- Several members suggested that the ability to attend meetings virtually has an upside, reducing the time needed for travel, and making it easier to attend the meetings. Several suggested that a hybrid meeting approach (in-person meeting, but with the ability to attend virtually), once the pandemic is over, should be explored.

## 3.0 Issues Impacting Schedule and Funding

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all nine meetings were held virtually, and meeting durations were shortened from a planned 4-6 hours to 2-3 hours. To cover all the desired content, nine meetings were held instead of six, as recommended in the Planning Framework. Under the same meeting format,

duration and frequency, there is the potential for Phase 2 to take slightly more than 6 months to complete.

Other issues that may impact schedule during Phase 2 include:

- The availability of the USGS-developed groundwater model. SCDNR reports that the USGS is still conducting their review of the model update report, and there is some uncertainty as to when the model and model report will be officially released for use.
- The availability of biological standards being developed through the flow-stream health relationships study being conducted by TNC, Clemson, Research Triangle Institute, SCDHEC and SCDNR. The RBC has expressed interest in further evaluating and potentially using select standards to set surface water conditions in the basin. The TNC is attempting to expedite the identification and selection of 3-5 key standards for RBC consideration; however, depending on the timing, this may delay completion of the assessment of surface water availability and shortages, a critical component of Phase 2.

No significant issues have been identified that impact funding of the planning process through completion of Phase 4.

## 4.0 Challenges

Through the two surveys and meeting discussions with the RBC, several on-going challenges have been identified: These challenges include:

- The virtual meeting format limits necessary interaction between RBC members. Some members are not able to share video and/or vote. To help remedy this, the Planning Team will offer more opportunity for group breakout sessions.
- Selecting a Chair and Vice Chair will remain a challenge, until in-person meetings are possible. The Planning Team feels that it is important to have a Chair so that the RBC can drive the process – not DNR, DHEC or the Facilitator. To help remedy this, a temporary chair and/or RBC liaison to the Planning Team may be identified to help set meeting agendas and serve as the voice of the RBC.