Upper Savannah River Basin Council

July 10, 2024 Meeting Minutes

RBC Members Present: Harry Shelley, Scott Willett, Mack Beaty, Daniel Milam, Alan Stuart, Mark Warner, Jill Miller, Katie Hottel, Cheryl Daniels, Jeff Phillips, Tonya Bonitatibus, Reagan Osbon, & Tonya Winbush

RBC Members Absent: Billy Owens (Don Todd, alternate, present), Jon Batson, Chuck Connolly, John Hains, Tim Hall, Dan Murph, Carl Price, Melisa Raimey, Cole Rogers, & Will Williams

Planning Team Present: Tom Walker, John Boyer, Ashley Reid, Kirk Westphal, Joe Koon, Scott Harder, Hannah Hartley, Leigh Anne Monroe, Alexis Modzelesky, & Andy Wachob

Total Present: 33

1. Call the Meeting to Order (Jill Miller, RBC Chair) 10:00–10:10
    a. Review of Meeting Objectives
    b. Approval of Agenda
        i. Agenda approved
        ii. Scott Willett – 1st
        iii. Daniel Milam – 2nd
    c. Approval of June 12th Minutes and Summary
        i. Minutes approved
        ii. Mack Beaty – 1st
        iii. Daniel Milam – 2nd
    d. Announcements and Housekeeping Items
        i. Info sheet about available funding from a settlement/ trust
            1. Erika Hollis is working on that with Anderson County
            2. Press release soon
        ii. Daniel: the bottom half of the cornstalks are brown. Haven't had rain in about 30 days. Farmers are in severe drought. Minimal yields
        iii. Every county of the state is in some level of drought
            1. Pee Dee jumped from normal to severe. First time ever
            2. DRC will reconvene in 2 weeks to see if they need to make further adjustments
            3. Q: what's the point of declaring a drought at a specific level? A: message for the population

2. Public Comment (Ashley Reid) 10:10–10:15
    a. Public Comment Period
        i. none
    b. Agency Comment Period
        i. none

3. June RBC Meeting Review (Ashley Reid and John Boyer) 10:15–10:20
    a. Reviewed results of synthetic/ extended drought scenarios
    b. Examined impacts on recreation access levels for the planning scenarios and synthetic drought scenarios
    c. drought response recommendations (chapter 8)
    d. eliminate DMAs and replace them with RBCs/ subset of members of RBCs

i. requires a change to the SC Drought Response Act
ii. C: long term importance to RBCs
iii. Currently have 4 DMAs, replace with eight river basins
iv. C: DMAs are more cumbersome, restrictive, and not as representative as RBCs
v. C: could be subcommittee of RBC, easier to get positions filled
vi. C: DRC committee members may not be as engaged
vii. Q: how do we get river basins to agree? A: statewide recommendations from multiple basins
viii. Scott is the first one to propose this
ix. Presented this to Saluda RBC, they really didn't care. They didn't get an impassioned speech from Scott. LSSRBC has the benefit of seeing recommendations ahead of time
x. Q: is this something we have to vote on to include? A: could make a motion now or wait for write up of chapter 8. Eventually will vote on it
xi. Q: will there be a process where it gets reviewed as a whole? Early finishers don't get the advantage of seeing what other RBCs have done. A: yes, can make updates in 5 years. Good planning process recommendation is to allow for recommendations made by other RBCs.
xii. C: need to have more people making decisions

4. SWAM Model Evaluation of Drought Plans (Amy Shaw and John Boyer) 10:20–10:35
    a. Current and 2070 High Demand Scenario
        i. Updates to Savannah model
            1. Updated stage storage curves and rule sets for Hartwell, Russell, and Thurmond
            2. Updated model code to allow Lake Thurmond to continue minimum releases if the lake dropped below the conservation pool
        ii. Example drought plan triggers
            1. Q: Are you focused on that first reservoir level trigger, or is it a combination of things? A: first trigger is more of a notification, start planning with second, third is a significant response
            2. C: assume 100% compliance
        iii. Typical drought ordinance
            1. Moderate-severe-extreme
        iv. ARJWS drought plan
            1. Current use- drought plan triggered .7% of time
            2. 2070 high demand- drought plan triggered 1.7% of time
            3. Permitted and registered- 5.6% of time
            4. 1st 4 years of drought scenario 2- 64.6%
        v. Lake Hartwell storage drought plan rules vs. no drought plan rules
            1. First 4 years of drought scenario 2
        vi. Comparison of drought plan demand reductions to reservoir storage
            1. 5 water uses in the 4 lakes they pull from
            2. Average annual demand in 2070 high demand scenario- 155.6 mgd (.02% of summer conservation pool storage)
            3. If demand reduced by 25%, 116.7 mgd (.005% of conservation pool storage)
            4. Reduction in annual demand as a percentage of conservation pool storage- . 017%
            5. C: need to be careful how we package the overabundance of water

6. Q: no hydropower demand? A: yes. Just focusing on water utility demand
7. Q: return flows? A: each system returns it back at the water treatment plan

b. Synthetic Drought Scenarios 1 and 2

5. Additional and Updated Surface Water Analyses (Amy Shaw, Kirk Westphal and John Boyer) 10:35-11:10
    a. Update on Synthetic/Extended Drought Analysis (Thurmond Releases)
        i. USACE plan for emergency drought operations
        ii. Resequencing historical flows to investigate potential future droughts
            1. 5 driest water years
            2. Repeating single-year drought
            3. Repeating synthetic drought year
        iii. Lake Thurmond outflow and storage
            1. 2070 high demand scenario
            2. Drought scenario 2
                a. Thurmond would still be sacrificed but minimum release would still happen
            3. Drought scenario 3
                a. No water can be released after 3 years
    b. Update on Safe Yield of Major Reservoirs
        i. Concepts and purpose
        ii. Methods
        iii. Lower USACE reservoirs
            1. Updated state storage relationships
            2. Adjusted Lake Hartwell release targets
            3. Updated Thurmond model
            4. Lake Hartwell
                a. Baseline: 712 mgd
                b. 2070: TBD
                c. Permitted and registered: 509 mgd
                d. Not substantial change
                e. Q: did you use the actual intake set point? A: I believe Pioneer sent us their intake set point
            5. Lake Russell
                a. Baseline: 1115 mgd
                b. 2070: TBD
                c. Permitted and registered: 619 mgd
                d. Changed from last meeting
            6. Lake Thurmond
                a. Baseline: 465 mgd
                b. 2070: TBD
                c. Permitted and registered: 301 mgd
                d. Lake Thurmond's minimum release requirements result in a lower safe yield than Hartwell
            7. The more we've done this exercise and updated it, we realize it's not that useful because these systems are so regulated

a. C: we suspend as many rules as possible to see what the true availability of water is but that's not the goal of this exercise. Make sure numbers aren't alarming
b. C. Analogous to Western water law where you have storage accounts and are looking at the reliability of storage accounts for each user. Different study than what we're doing here, which is looking at the hydrologic availability of water for the reservoir as a whole, subject to complex operating rules
c. Q: Savannah, GA regional water plan includes safe yield? A: they didn't look at that
d. Q: Based on GA plans they have finalized, do they have any basins that should we have drought here, is an alternative water supply we might be looking to access? A: Some of them do.
e. C: GA is further along and has more recommendations. A: We have objectives to have interbasin planning in SC, but it is not explicit. Will look and see if there's something related to the ATL area
f. C: Wilkes County Down has ground water so they can switch back and forth. A lot of them are pulling out of the Broad River, they have both ground and surface water
g. C: DO NOT TRUST GEORGIA
h. Q: where does Keowee fit in? A: When we get to stage 4

c. Alternative 2 Comparison
    i. USACE drought contingency plan
    ii. USACE reservoirs drought trigger action level
    iii. Alternative 2 vs current operating rules
        1. Decrease in required flows from Thurmond for each trigger level
        2. No seasonal variation in trigger levels
        3. No dependency on Broad River inflows
        4. Raises trigger level 3 by 6 ft
    iv. Lake Thurmond Response to change in release rules
        1. Not that impactful
        2. Q: biggest issue is why do you need to drop off in the winter when you already have a drought? Should start doing conservation earlier. A: the year they did leave more water in was a hurricane. Keeping the flow downstream is pretty critical. We can't stop giving water to SRS
        3. C: flow study needs to be finished. Corps is working off of a half-finished study
        4. Q: were these models constructed to have unimpaired flow? A: can go look at it. Seen it go below 3000

Break *11:10–11:20*

6. Development of Planning Process Recommendations (Ashley Reid and John Boyer) 11:20–12:00
a. Recommendations could include
    i. Suggestions for improving the river basin planning process
    ii. Considerations for additional technical info
    iii. potential changes to state policy or to existing regulatory or legislative environment
b. planning process recommendations may include

i. changes to the RBC membership, bylaws, meeting schedule, or procedures
ii. ideas to improve communication
iii. funding needs
iv. improvements to the public outreach process
v. implementing RBP and continued RBC activities

c. Saluda RBC discussed
i. Finding ways to get more public involvement
ii. Forums for RBCs to meet as a group
iii. Update meetings or IRC of Broad, Saluda, and US RBCs
iv. RBC presence at Water Day in March

d. Group 1
i. Lack of public participation
1. Better identifying the public we want to reach
ii. Coordinate/ collaborate with AWWA and water advocacy agencies' public outreach committees
iii. State water plan recommendations
iv. Develop public engagement plan/ strategy to improve public engagement
v. More intentional outreach to groups outside the water space

e. Group 2
i. Specify public outreach
ii. Form subcommittees to communicate with city/county boards
iii. Increased RBC collaboration (at least 1-2 meetings a year)
iv. RBC recruitment to include elected officials and manufacturing
v. Include/ invite manufacturing in the planning process
vi. More intense audit of recruited RBC membership to evaluate what groups are missing from the process

f. Online group
i. Ecological planning process
ii. Coordinate/ initiate discussions with newly formed DES
1. Understand their objectives of the plan
iii. Introduce grant program to implement plan
iv. Engage Association of Counties
v. Upfront engagement of elected officials
vi. Expand ecological evaluations in the planning process with respect to drought
1. Study impacts of droughts on fishkills due to DO
vii. RBC Meeting quarterly

g. Group 3
i. Develop strategies for maintaining membership and sustaining RBCs
ii. Devote at least 1 meeting for scoping so to keep the RBCs moving forward
iii. States to provide funding so that RBCs can continue to meet

h. Full list
i. Increase public engagement
1. C: lose specificity by putting it in one bullet point. A: will use examples to specify
2. C: should have a process where everyone comes together. A: someone from all RBCs should get together and identify for DES who's going to take the lead and put the water plan together
3. Q: is the plan to distribute the plan back to the RBCs first or does it go to everyone at one time? A: state plan not going to be done in a vacuum.

RBCs should have a seat at the table when DES puts together the state water plan

ii. Increased audits of recruited RBC members to evaluate which groups are missing
    1. Maybe this basin needs manufacturing?
    2. Elected officials may not have good attendance. Staffer could come
    3. LSS reached out to Sen. Tom Young from Aiken. Try to have him speak in the fall to talk about legislative priorities and what happened last session in relation to water
    4. Q: would it be useful to have a representative involved in the discussion in August/ September?
    5. Maybe we want reps from smaller areas that aren't fully staffed

iii. Water quality issues
    1. Pushed off to future planning
    2. We should holistically look at it in the future
    3. Quality already being looked at in other studies
    4. Individual basins should decide if they need to study water quality
    5. C: The next step is water quality. Also, if the completed plan causes water quality issues, then it's a wasted plan
    6. Q: is there a discrete statement in the planning framework that says that water quality may be addressed in the future planning phase? A: The idea was that water quality would be important in the future, no details
    7. Should identify what water quality issues should be discussed in the future and who should be at the table
    8. C: if it's not mentioned in the plan, it's not eligible for funding
    9. Devote meeting to off-cycle scoping to identify additions/ enhancements to the plan
    10. Planning process metrics vs progress metrics
        a. Not going to do progress metrics until the end
        b. Use to measure the effectiveness of the implementation plan
        c. Talk more when we develop progress metrics in the final meetings

iv. Start putting a rough draft of chapter 9 together with planning process recommendations

Lunch *12:00–12:30*

7. Development of Technical, Policy, Legislative, and Regulatory Recommendations (Ashley Reid and John Boyer) 12:30–1:50
    a. Homework: start thinking about technical recommendations
        i. Use Broad and Edisto plans
        ii. Tonya has provided some technical recommendations

8. Upcoming Meeting Schedule, Topics, and Draft Chapter Review Schedule (Ashley Reid and John Boyer) 1:50–2:00
    a. Not meeting in August
    b. Fine on schedule
    c. Q: when is the end date? A: we need 1.5 meetings to finish the discussion on recommendations. Will start giving draft chapters to review in the next month. 2

chapters ready to review, more over next 4-5 months. Chapter reviews don't take much meeting time. Next meeting recommendation plans, then implementation plan (takes 1-2 meetings), another meeting to review whole draft plan and talk about edits. 5-6 meetings away from having a draft plan ready to go public, end of the year/ beginning of January

d. 9/11 is the date for next meeting
e. Should see chapter 2 and 3 drafts by next meeting
    i. Word doc and track changes/ comments. Excel logs of all of the comments by commenter and chapter
    ii. No subcommittees, everyone looks at drafts
f. Page 15 of planning framework
    i. RBPs described in this document are intended to focus on water quantity issues but water quality issues may be highlighted when appropriate. Water quality considerations will be more fully developed in later iterations of the RBP.
    ii. List of things that the State is concerned about

Minutes: Taylor Le Moal and Tom Walker

Approved: 9/11/2024

RBC Chat:

11:02:58 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:
10 min break until 11:12
11:53:34 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:
pausing for breakouts
12:04:31 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:
3 more mins for breakouts and then we'll reconvene at 12:30
12:08:44 From Tonya B to Everyone:
So did everyone go to lunch? What time should we call back in?
12:10:57 From Kirk Westphal to Everyone:
Looks like people are getting lunch. Reconvening at 12:30.
12:10:58 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:
restart at 1230
13:30:47 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:
one sec tonya and i'll get you in
13:46:07 From Tonya B to Everyone:
Agreed. I didn't mean w r should do water quality this round just that it needs to be next round
13:46:52 From Tonya B to Everyone:
I guess other than fish kill issue but that will probably be a proofing situation :)
13:50:26 From Tonya B to Everyone:
Sorry I have to run
13:50:46 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:
thanks tonya
13:58:50 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:
we are skipping august meeting

14:04:46 From Thomas Walker to Everyone:
meeting adjourned