

Georgia Department of Natural Resources

2 Martin Luther King Jr., Drive, Suite 1152 East Tower, Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Noel Holcomb, Commissioner

Carol A. Couch, Ph.D., Director

Environmental Protection Division

(404) 656-4713

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Draft Statewide Water Management Plan is Presented To The Water Council

A draft version of Georgia's first comprehensive statewide water management plan was presented to the Water Council on Thursday and is now available for public review. The document, titled "*Georgia's Water Resources: A Blueprint for the Future*," was developed by the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) of the Department of Natural Resources. It will serve as a framework for management of the state's water resources, and addresses both water quantity and water quality.

The recommended policies contained in this plan take into consideration our currently inadequate knowledge about Georgia's water resources, and as required by state law, the policies are consistent with current statutory authority," said EPD Director Carol A. Couch.

The Comprehensive Statewide Water Management Planning Act of 2004 required that EPD develop the plan, and present it to the Water Council by July of this year. The Water Council is a 14-member body consisting of legislators, legislative appointees and state agency heads who have water-related responsibilities. The Water Council will begin accepting public comments on the draft plan later in July. The law requires that the plan be brought before the General Assembly for ratification in 2008.

EPD developed the plan with extensive input from the public. Seven river Basin Advisory Committees were created with 20 to 30 members per committee to get regional perspective. In addition, a State Advisory Committee was formed consisting of 32 people including representatives from local governments, agriculture, business, mining and environmental organizations. The general public participated in the planning process during 22 town hall meetings held around the state during 2006 and 2007.

Featured new policies are on the subjects of water conservation, reservoir development, interbasin transfer and water quality improvement. The proposed plan puts in place a statewide moratorium on interbasin transfer of raw water. An interbasin transfer involves the withdrawal of water from one river basin to be used and discharged in a different river basin.

Guidance to initiate regional planning of water resource development throughout the state is also proposed in the draft plan. "Regional water planning is not only for the metropolitan Atlanta region, but is absolutely necessary for the state as a whole," said Director Couch. "The recommended approach to regional water planning is based on current authority to prepare water development and conservation plans throughout Georgia."

The draft plan is available for public review at www.georgiawatercouncil.org.

News Media Contact: Kevin Chambers (404) 651-7970