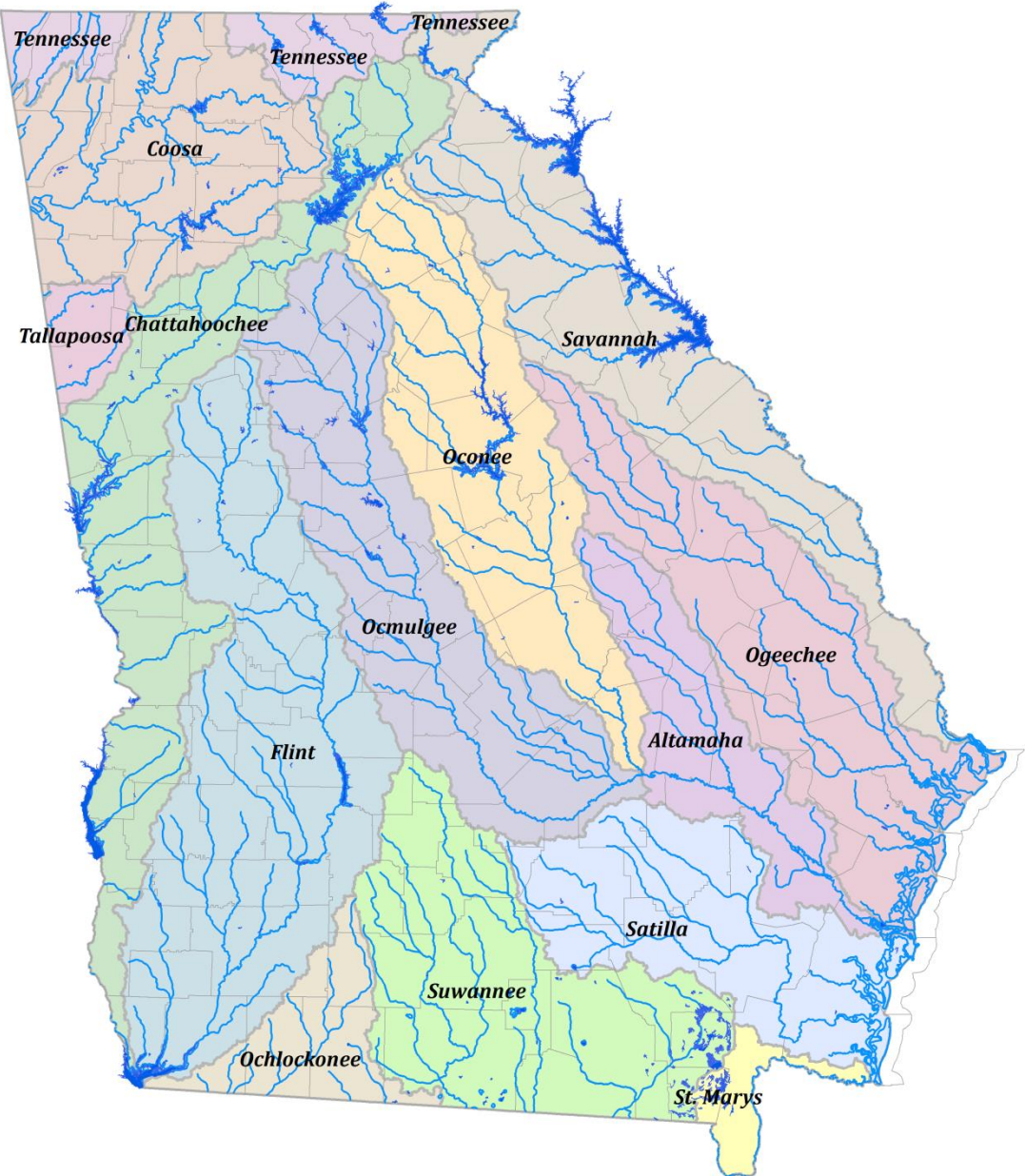


WATERSHED ASSESSMENT AND PROTECTION PLAN GUIDANCE: Introduction



Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Environmental Protection Division
Watershed Protection Branch

To promote the goals of restoring and protecting Georgia's water resources, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GAEPD) requires that an entity (permittee) holding a permit for a wastewater treatment facility that intends to build a new water pollution control plant (WPCP), expand an existing facility, or that operates a WPCP designed for 1 MGD or greater conduct a Watershed Assessment and develop and implement a Watershed Protection Plan. The watershed assessment area is defined as all watersheds or sub-watersheds that are served by the permitted facility (service area) and contained within the permittee's jurisdictional boundaries. The Watershed Assessment and Watershed Protection Plan should be consistent and fit together with the overall objectives of determining the current condition of the watershed assessment area, and identifying and addressing the effects of urbanization, growth, development, and associated land use changes. The Watershed Assessment and Watershed Protection Plan represent a watershed approach for examining the factors that impact water quality and provide a means of achieving the ultimate goal of restoring and protecting the State of Georgia's waters. The information provided in these documents is primarily intended for the permittee's use in maintaining and improving water quality and biological integrity within the watershed assessment area.

The GAEPD's Watershed Planning and Monitoring Program (WPMP), under the Watershed Protection Branch, has developed four guidance documents that outline the purpose and contents of the Watershed Monitoring Plan, Watershed Assessment, Watershed Protection Plan, and the Watershed Protection Plan Annual Reporting Requirements. Standard Operating Procedures have been developed by GAEPD and the Georgia Wildlife Resources Department (GAWRD) to provide guidance and requirements for conducting macroinvertebrate and fish bioassessments, which are part of Watershed Assessments and the long-term monitoring component of Watershed Protection Plans. These documents are intended to give general guidance, in addition to specific requirements. They are not meant to limit the scope of how to evaluate and improve water quality throughout Georgia.

The first step in the process of conducting a Watershed Assessment is to prepare a Watershed Monitoring Plan (WMP). The WMP should present a general description of the watershed assessment area and identify environmental factors contained in and around the area. It should provide a brief narrative description of each of these items, as well as present these items on maps. The proposed monitoring sites, and sampling and analytical methodologies should be described in detail. The site locations should provide an optimum representation of the current conditions with respect to water quality and health of aquatic biological communities, and should take into account areas of possible future growth. A pre-submittal meeting with GAEPD is strongly encouraged to discuss aspects of the Monitoring Plan and to address any questions about the Watershed Assessment and Protection Plan process. The Monitoring Plan must be submitted to the WPMP for approval prior to initiating monitoring and assessment activities. Once the WMP has been approved, it can be implemented.

The purpose of the Watershed Assessment (WA) is to gather information on the various elements that together describe the current condition of the watershed assessment area watersheds. In addition, projections of future growth and its potential impact on water quality are explored. The information is presented in the Watershed Assessment report. The report should include a thorough discussion of the results and observations obtained from implementation of the WMP. The WA should identify potential sources of current water quality problems and impairments to biological communities. The potential

impacts of future growth and development should be identified and discussed, and in some cases, modeling may be used to support these conclusions. Initial ideas for managing and protecting the watershed assessment area watersheds may be included in the WA. The WA report must be submitted to the WPMP for concurrence.

Once the WPMP has concurred with the WA, a Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) can be developed. The WPP is based, in part, on the findings of the WA. The main focus of the WPP is the development and implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for addressing the primary water quality and biological issues determined from the WA, and for the continued management, monitoring, and protection of the watershed assessment area watershed(s). These BMPs can involve a number of diverse activities that may already be ongoing or developed specifically for the WPP. The WPP explores potential funding sources and includes a schedule for implementation. There may be some overlap with other programs with similar goals of protecting and maintaining waters of the State. The WPP should be consistent with these programs, and where possible, coordination of the programs should be considered to avoid duplication of effort and conserve funding resources.

The WPP must be submitted by the permittee and approved by the WPMP. It is referenced in the permittee's wastewater facility permit and its implementation is required as a permit condition. The WPP is considered a living document, and should periodically be modified based on changing conditions within the watershed assessment area. Proposed changes to the WPP should be discussed with GAEPD before being made final. A complete update of the WPP is recommended at least every 10 years. If there have been multiple changes or additions, GAEPD may require that the WPP be updated.

As part of the Watershed Protection Plan, annual submittals to GAEPD are required, which consist of progress reports, monitoring data, support documentation, and a certification that the WPP is being implemented. The progress report summarizes accomplishments of the previous year, including water quality and biological monitoring conducted, and implementation of new or ongoing BMPs. Any modifications made to the WPP are also documented in the progress report. The required submittals of water quality and biological monitoring data and support documentation are described in the Watershed Protection Plan Annual Report Requirements guidance document.