

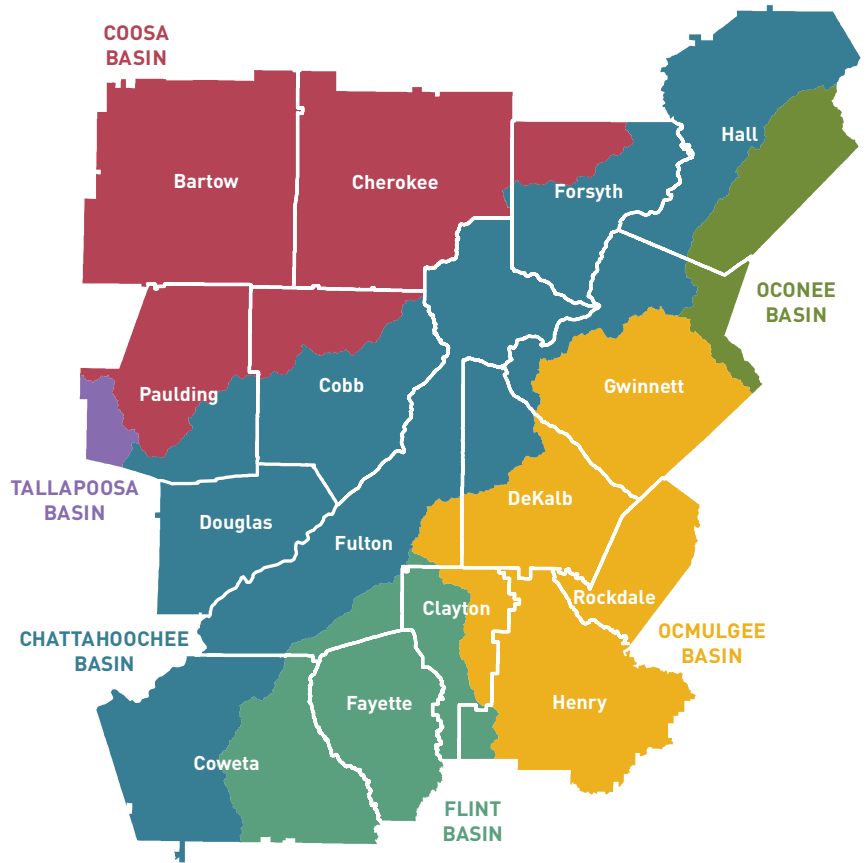


# 2020 Activities & Progress Report

Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District

# About the District

The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (the Metro Water District, or simply, the District) was created by the Georgia General Assembly in 2001 as a regional water resources planning agency. The Metro Water District develops comprehensive action items and strategies for the management of water supply and water conservation, wastewater, and stormwater for the 15-county, 95-city metropolitan Atlanta region. The first suite of plans was adopted in 2003 and updated in 2009. The District completed the second update in June 2017, when, for the first time, the three separate plans were combined into a single, integrated Water Resource Management Plan (the District Plan). In 2020, the District embarked on its third update of the District Plan, which is to be completed by 2022.



## 2020 Governing Board Members

### — Elected Officials —

**The Hon. Keisha Lance Bottoms**  
*Mayor, City of Atlanta*

**The Hon. Steve Taylor**  
*Commissioner, Bartow County*

**The Hon. Harry Johnston**  
*Chairman, Cherokee County Commission*

**The Hon. Jeff Turner**  
*Chairman, Clayton County Commission*

**The Hon. Mike Boyce**  
*Chairman, Cobb County Commission*

**The Hon. Paul Poole**  
*Chairman, Coweta County Commission*

**The Hon. Michael L. Thurmond**  
*CEO, DeKalb County*

**The Hon. Romona Jackson Jones**  
*Chairman, Douglas County Commission*

**The Hon. Randy Ognio**  
*Chairman, Fayette County Commission*

**The Hon. Laura Semanson**  
*Chairman, Forsyth County Commission*

**The Hon. Robb Pitts**  
*Chairman, Fulton County Commission*

**The Hon. Danny Dunagan**  
*Mayor, City of Gainesville, Hall County*

**The Hon. Charlotte Nash**  
*Chairman, Gwinnett County Commission*

**The Hon. June Wood**  
*Chairman, Henry County Commission*

**The Hon. Dave Carmichael**  
*Chairman, Paulding County Commission*

**The Hon. Oz Nesbitt, Sr.**  
*Chairman, Rockdale County Commission*

### — Citizen Members —

**Glenn Page** (District Chair), *Marietta*  
**Katie Kirkpatrick** (Vice Chair), *Atlanta*  
**Mark Berry** (Secretary/Treasurer), *Atlanta*

**Pam Burnett**, *Marietta*  
**Bradley Currey, Jr.**, *Atlanta*  
**Kit Dunlap**, *Gainesville*

**Birdel Jackson**, *Atlanta*  
**Gerald Pouncey, Jr.**, *Atlanta*  
**Tim Thoms**, *Fayetteville*

Cover photo credit: Diana Petrova of Chamblee, GA

# Progress on Many Fronts in 2020

2020 has been an unprecedented year. So many times we've all heard this said. And, these words ring true for the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District and our regional water utilities in myriad ways that have demonstrated, again and again, our unwavering commitment to the good stewardship of our water resources.

2020 began for the District with bright, new ideas and plans for seeing them through. Then, along with the rest of the world, we watched as COVID-19 presented us with one uncertainty after the other, and in March, ultimately closed our physical doors for the foreseeable future.

But as the world hunkered down and our day-to-day activity was greatly disrupted, one fact grew clear: the critical, essential nature of our mission as water professionals is profound! The work of bringing clean water to homes and businesses, treating wastewater, and keeping our watersheds healthy does not stop — even under circumstances as critically challenging as those we've seen in the past ten months. In that time, the world slowed down, but our region and state's resilient water professionals — water distribution and wastewater collections systems operators, line maintenance crews, water quality specialists, stormwater managers, lab technicians, environmental educators, engineers, planners, customer service representatives, and others — picked up the gauntlet so that the public's water services did not miss a beat.

What a year to begin one's tenure as chair. This was, indeed, the first year I had the honor of serving as District Board Chair. I am a water utility manager, so I am intimately familiar with just how essential water is. If there's anything I've learned in my 34 years of involvement in regional and statewide water issues, including working on a number of contentious water disputes, it's that this work requires dedicated leadership through the tough times as well as the good. And, I look forward to continuing to lead the District in the years to come.

For the past 19 years, the District has served as the comprehensive planning and policy-making entity for water supply and conservation, wastewater, and watershed management for the 15-county metro Atlanta area. The District is the only major metro area in the country with 110 jurisdictions working in coordination to implement an impactful suite of integrated water resource stewardship measures.

In any ordinary year, the District brings together elected and appointed officials, technical experts, and stakeholders at more

than 40 meetings and discussion forums where ideas and best practices are shared, and plan components are created and perfected. 2020 was no different. With our current work on the update of the 2022 Plan underway, collaborating among stakeholders proved as important as ever, and the District pivoted quickly to a virtual meeting format to make this happen.

The District's existing culture of collaboration and planning was an advantage as we adapted to this year's changing circumstances. Early in the pandemic, the importance of communication and public education became clear. District staff worked closely with utility partners to develop and publicize key messaging underscoring the essential role of water in maintaining public health. This included emphasizing the importance of protecting water resources through proper sanitary practices, like preventing sewer overflows by not flushing wipes. The District also promoted water conservation through practices such as turning off the tap during the 20 second hand-scrub.

Many utilities within the District also accomplished the monumental task of quickly pivoting their robust educational programming from in-person outreach activities to activities that were responsibly socially distant. This response has been outstanding and has shined a light on how critical water infrastructure and an agile workforce can bring value to a community. All, while keeping the water running.

Within the pages of this report we celebrate the outstanding work of the District and our utility and community partners in 2020. I am incredibly proud of the hard work of our region's essential water professionals.

On behalf of the District Governing Board, staff, and all our partners and stakeholders, I am hopeful for 2021. It is my desire that we can all be together, working alongside each other in person again soon. But I am simultaneously proud of what we accomplished together this year, even working apart. 2020 was unprecedented — but it certainly set a new precedent in excellence, proving that working for the protection of our water resources never stops. And that we are ready, now more than ever before, to meet new challenges with fortitude.

Glenn Page  
*Metro Water District Chair*



# Education and Stakeholder Engagement

## *Innovative and Impactful Public Participation*

Education and communication are central components to the Metro Water District's planning efforts. For 19 years, the District has hosted engaging and interactive events and contests for the public, and has supported water providers and local governments with outstanding educational resources, program assistance, and engagement opportunities. This year, as many District and utility partner events were cancelled due to COVID-19, education and communication efforts looked a little different.

In 2020, the District continued to provide resources from its catalogue of messaging and brochures. While utility partners and others still requested materials from the District's comprehensive printed resource catalogue, the District also worked with stakeholders to create new messaging and materials. These new materials addressed the changes in water use related to stay-at-home orders, such as messaging about the hazards of placing sanitizing and other wipes in pipes, and the importance of shutting off the tap while washing hands and brushing teeth, and checking for leaks in common plumbing fixtures.

The District also continued its schedule of public engagement contests, including the Water Drop Dash T-shirt design contest, the high school video contest, the Water Reflections calendar contest, and the 19th annual middle school essay contest. The middle school essay contest topics highlighted the importance of clean water during a pandemic and the essential water industry jobs that make clean water possible.

The District's utility and water authority partners continued their educational programming despite increased difficulties with in-person engagement in 2020. Water educators were able to pivot programming online, offering virtual workshops or lunch-and-learns. They mailed materials to participants' homes and conducted workshops online in real-time. They reimagined in-person workshops with new safety procedures, offering smaller class sizes and increasing the physical distance among attendees. One partner filmed the District's "Our Water Story" puppet show for its local library system and made the video available to all District partners. Others produced virtual tours of their water and wastewater treatment facilities. The creativity and out-of-the-box thinking exhibited by water educators across the District made it possible for critical education and conservation work to continue without interruption.

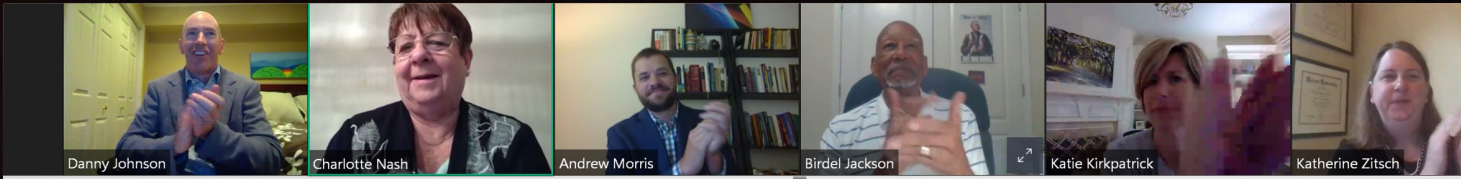
In October, the District received, for the third time, the WaterSense Sustained Excellence Award from the U.S. Environmental

Protection Agency (EPA). This is also the sixth consecutive year the EPA has recognized the District for its innovative and creative approach to WaterSense and water efficiency, including programming and public engagement during Fix a Leak Week, launching the multi-family toilet rebate program, and promotion of the WaterSense label.

### **The District's Critically Important Stakeholder Groups Continue Vital Engagement in a Virtual World**

While the District uses science, data, and good stewardship to guide planning for regional water management, it relies on the volunteers and water professionals that make up our core stakeholder groups for critical input and feedback. These three groups — the Governing Board, the Basin Advisory Councils, and the Technical, Coordinating Committees — work together to create, analyze, and approve plan action items throughout the planning process. The Governing Board sets directives during the plan cycle; the Basin Advisory Councils provide public stakeholder input from a diversity of perspectives from across the region; and the Technical Coordinating Committees, made up of water professionals from the District's utilities and water authorities, provide feedback and expertise on Plan requirements. As the District works toward the 2022 Plan update, continued collaboration with stakeholders is important to creating data-driven and implementable action items that address regional issues.

In 2020, traditional methods of engagement with the District's stakeholder groups have pivoted to a virtual platform. Meetings occurred online and over the phone, creating new opportunities for engagement as meeting attendance is no longer limited by the ability to attend in-person. Dialogue and feedback occur naturally, as virtual chat enables stakeholders to continue conversations and ask questions while presentations take place. The switch to virtual platforms has allowed collaboration to continue so that the 2022 Plan update remains on schedule.



We're a **WaterSense Award** winner



Making **water savings** possible!





# Water Resource Management Plan Update

## *Holistic and Innovative Regional Planning*

The Metro Water District has maintained and updated the Water Resource Management Plan since 2003. With each update, staff continues to improve the District Plan by incorporating innovative policies and best practices, as well as the latest science, data, and research available. In June 2017, the Metro Water District Governing Board approved the most recent version of the District Plan that, for the first time, successfully integrated water supply and conservation, wastewater and septic management, and watershed management into a single, holistic planning approach. The District is a recognized national leader in water resources management, and this plan continues that legacy.

Currently, the District is embarking on the third update of the District Plan, slated for approval in 2022. The update will consider the latest trends in water demands, wastewater generation, and water quality, and will evaluate necessary changes to the District Plan's action items and requirements to address the District's goals. The 2022 Plan Update will maintain the integrated structure of the previous District Plan and will demonstrate how the District's communities will meet the long-term water resource needs for the region.

During the two-year planning process, District staff will evaluate opportunities to increase the 15-county region's water supply resilience. This task will focus on the challenges posed to smaller surface water supply sources and will include strategies that apply to the greater region as well. Given frequent droughts, a reliance on surface water, and a growing population, the District plays an important role in coordinating a regional strategy to maximize availability of local water supplies for human health and economic sustainability.

When the region's communities follow the same drought response framework, the District can better plan for and respond to challenging circumstances. During drought, it is especially important that all residents and businesses play a role in minimizing the impact to their water resources for the benefit of all who live, work, and play within the watershed. With that in mind, the District will also develop a drought options menu that will guide communities toward the most impactful drought response options provided within the Environmental Protection Division's Drought Rule.

In 2021, the District will continue working with utility partners and stakeholders to update key action items. The District intends to release the draft 2022 Plan for public comment in the summer of 2022 for subsequent adoption by the Governing Board in December 2022.

### Forecasting Stormwater and Watershed Conditions for More Effective Planning

Stormwater is a resource with important connections to health and safety, but the specific conditions that inform management decisions can be difficult to quantify and make actionable. Furthermore, there is no single controlling entity that manages a watershed or stormwater management system; responsibility is instead divided among public (local, state, and federal) and private owners. Effectively managing stormwater requires continual innovation; from the development of new tools and technology to support environmental monitoring, asset information and mapping; to engineering approaches that work with nature.

To address these challenges, the District is developing new stormwater and watershed forecasts for the 2022 Plan update that will provide information about future conditions. The forecasts will be used to guide planning that promotes holistic watershed and stormwater management for resilience, public safety, and watershed health.

The final stormwater and watershed forecasts will lead to local management requirements that are regionally impactful and backed by research. Additionally, the forecasts will become a platform for baselining and assessing progress on stormwater and watershed improvement across the region and will support a narrative that stormwater is a valuable resource rather than a burden that must be swept away in pipes and managed by local jurisdictions.

# Technical Assistance Program

## *One-Stop-Shop for Plan Implementation Needs*

Since 2016, the District's Technical Assistance Program (TAP) has played a key role in assisting the Metro Water District's local governments and water utilities in successfully implementing action items laid out in the District Plan. TAP provides high-quality, well-integrated technical assistance to help partners identify resources and develop strategies to address their specific challenges.

The District's planning efforts have a significant impact in large part thanks to the collaborative relationships it has fostered with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) and the District's community partners, local governments, and utilities. Every five years, EPD audits the region's local governments, water and sewer utilities, and authorities on their compliance with the District Plan's measures — and renews and issues permits based on that compliance. In 2020, TAP made adaptations to its work with EPD auditors to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, including accepting all audit documentation in electronic format. District staff also worked with EPD to identify action items presenting the greatest challenge to communities during the pandemic and proposed changes to ease the audit process.

Pandemic-related uncertainty notwithstanding, in 2021, TAP tentatively plans to coordinate county-wide integrated action item meetings to assist member communities in fulfilling plan requirements. County staff working in water supply, wastewater, public health, and planning will be invited to walk through all integrated action items together in one forum.

In September 2019, the District created the Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) users group to enable utility partners across the region to share information about this new technology that is growing in popularity across the country. AMI provides near real-time data, helping utilities improve water efficiency by pinpointing areas of water loss, providing proactive customer service in the form of leak notifications, and improving overall system performance. Throughout 2020, the District facilitated virtual bi-monthly meetings to encourage knowledge sharing among utilities in order to tackle common issues and create streamlined processes for data analysis.

In February 2020, the Toilet Rebate Program created a new marketing campaign for both in-store and digital promotion of the program. Numerous home improvement stores across the District received eye-catching brochures featuring convenient tear off cards to help educate and guide customers in purchasing efficient WaterSense toilets. The District also created digital and printed flyers for participating utilities to distribute and share with their customers. These efforts helped the District to reach new rebate customers, further increasing water efficiency and conservation across the District.

Created in 2019, the District's Multi-Family Toilet Rebate Program expanded in 2020 to include 13 cities and counties across the District. Since its inception, the program has helped to replace 586 older and inefficient toilets with 0.8 gpf ultra high-efficient toilets. The program continues to receive interest; at the time of this writing, two additional properties are undergoing the application process.

### **2020 SWAPS Help Utilities Identify Potential Contamination to Water Supplies**

In September of 2020, the Metro Water District celebrated EPD's approval of updated Source Water Assessment Plans (SWAPs) for 26 water providers, 39 water supply watersheds, and 42 public drinking water intakes. This marks the District's completion of a two-year effort contracted by the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) and EPD. The update was conducted to provide member local governments with implementation support.

This work demonstrates the District's greatest strengths: the ability to partner and collaborate with multiple agencies and participating utilities over a long-range planning horizon to prepare very detailed, highly effective planning documents. The approved SWAPs will replace plans adopted in 2000 and will ultimately help utilities identify potential sources of contamination to their drinking water supplies. Through advances in data availability and geographic information systems (GIS) technologies, the SWAPs also provide water systems with an array of current data and maps relevant to each water supply watershed. This will better inform their local emergency water plans and other management practices.





# Don't Flush Your Money Down the Drain! TOILET REBATE

SAVE UP TO \$100 when you purchase a WaterSense toilet  
Apply Online [northgeorgiawater.org/toiletrebate](http://northgeorgiawater.org/toiletrebate)



Install a WaterSense UHET or HET toilet



Property or residence must be built in 1993 or earlier



Water provider must participate in the program

## Single-Family Program

1.1 gpf or lower - \$100 rebate  
1.28 gpf - \$50 Rebate

Resident must pay water bill directly to water provider  
*(HOA or condo associations are not eligible)*

Provide purchase receipt and current water utility bill

**Single-Family Toilet Rebate Program**  
How to apply for your toilet rebate:

- Live in a single-family residential home built in 1993 or earlier.
- Purchase and install a WaterSense ultra high efficiency toilet (UHET) or high efficiency toilet (HET). *Note: Dual flush 1.1/1.6 gpf are rebated as 1.28 gpf.*
- Submit a copy of your most recent water utility bill.
- You must pay your water provider directly. *(HOA or condo associations are not eligible).*
- Visit our website for complete details.

## Multi-Family Program

Applicant must be the property-owner or landowner and not an individual resident living in multi-family housing

Property must have a master-meter residential account

Property cannot purchase and/or install toilets prior to approval from the Metro Water District

**Multi-Family Toilet Rebate Program**  
How to apply for your toilet rebate:

- Be the property-owner or landlord of a multi-family residential property built in 1993 or earlier.
- Property must have a master-meter residential account.
- Get approved by the Metro Water District to purchase and install a WaterSense ultra high efficiency toilet or high efficiency toilet before purchase.
- Must be replacing a minimum of 30 toilets.
- Visit our website for complete details.

\*Please note that dual flush toilets that are 1.1/1.6gpf are rebated as 1.28gpf

For more information or to apply online, visit [northgeorgiawater.org/toiletrebate](http://northgeorgiawater.org/toiletrebate)

Email [TRebate@atlantaregional.org](mailto:TRebate@atlantaregional.org) or call 404.463.8645.





# Financials for 2020

The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District operated on a calendar-year budget, with revenues coming from local government dues (\$1,208,186), and a grant from GEFA and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (\$34,850) to complete the update of the Source Water Assessment Plans across the District. The \$0.25 per capita dues for 2020 maintains the same rate from 2019 which was raised to grow the fund balance for the 2022 Water Resource Management Plan update. The budget included funding to continue the District's multi-year implementation tasks and begin work on the 2022 Plan update. In 2020, the District's Governing Board voted to shift the fiscal recognition of state appropriated funds from 2020 to 2021 to match the State's fiscal year. While this accounting shift makes it appear that no state appropriations were provided in 2020, the state has consistently provided funding to the District since the District's creation in 2001.

## Funding Support for 2022 Plan Update Received

The Georgia General Assembly passed their 2021 Fiscal Year Budget including a total of \$750,000 for District support. This figure includes \$200,000 for annual program administration plus \$550,000 to support the development of the 2022 Water Resource Management Plan Update. The General Assembly has supported the District's Plan and each of its three 5-year Plan updates. In 2020, the District's Governing Board voted to shift the fiscal recognition of state appropriated funds from 2020 to 2021 to match the State's fiscal year. Therefore, these appropriations will be shown in the District's 2021 budget. The District recognizes and appreciates the important contributions the State of Georgia makes in funding the District's efforts.

Below is a review of the revenues and expenses for 2020. This accounting is subject to adjustment after fiscal year-end close and an independent audit.

	2020 Budget Approved May 22, 2019 Per Capita Dues Rate \$0.25	2020 Budget Approved December 2, 2020 \$0.25
<b>Beginning Fund Balance (Estimated)</b> . . . . .	<b>\$640,313</b>	<b>\$796,174</b>
<b>Revenues</b>		
State Funding (Appropriations) . . . . .	\$350,000	- <sup>1</sup>
State Funding (GEFA) . . . . .	-	-
Source Water Assessment Plan Grant (GEFA/DNR) . . . . .	\$34,850	\$34,850
Local Dues (2010 Census at \$0.25 per capita) . . . . .	\$1,208,186	\$1,208,186
Interest Income . . . . .	\$1,000	\$1,000
Misc. Fees . . . . .	\$45,000	\$45,000
<b>Total Revenues</b> . . . . .	<b>\$1,639,036</b>	<b>\$1,289,036</b>
<b>Expenses by Type</b>		
Chairman's Allowance . . . . .	\$3,000	\$1,500
Salaries . . . . .	\$505,899	\$485,397
Fringe Benefits . . . . .	\$273,186	\$286,384
Overhead . . . . .	\$361,496	\$319,517
Contracts . . . . .	\$315,000	\$240,000
Miscellaneous Operating . . . . .	\$115,000	\$ 65,000
Public Awareness / Education . . . . .	\$100,000	\$ 60,000
<b>Total Expenses</b> . . . . .	<b>\$1,673,581</b>	<b>\$1,457,798</b>

<sup>1</sup> In 2020, the District's Governing Board voted to shift the fiscal recognition of state appropriated funds from 2020 to 2021 to match the State's fiscal year.



**Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District**

**International Tower, 229 Peachtree Street NE, Suite 100 | Atlanta, GA 30303**

The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District is staffed by the Atlanta Regional Commission and manages a comprehensive, integrated plan for water supply and water conservation, wastewater, and watershed management in the 15-county metro Atlanta region.

**[northgeorgiawater.org](http://northgeorgiawater.org)**



@NorthGAWater | [comments@northgeorgiawater.com](mailto:comments@northgeorgiawater.com)