

# 2023

## Activities & Progress Report

Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District

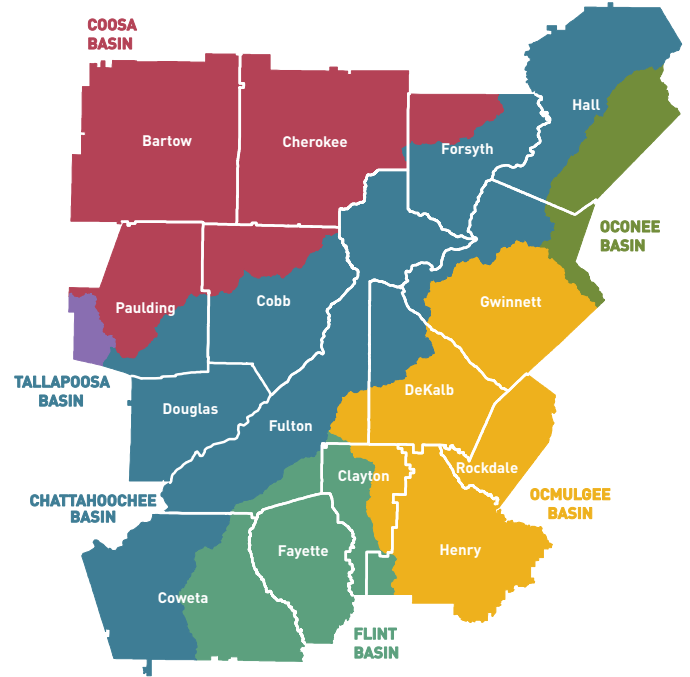


# About the District

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, 96-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 Resources Management Plan (the District Plan).

The third update of the District Plan was adopted in December 2022 and included new water efficiency code requirements for the region and the first-of-its-kind Stormwater Forecast (Forecast) which represents a region-wide accounting of the runoff volume from developed lands that have the potential to be managed by stormwater control measures.



## 2023 Governing Board Members

### — Elected Officials —

The Hon. Andre Dickens  
*Mayor, City of Atlanta*

The Hon. Matthew Santini  
*Mayor, City of Cartersville*

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

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

The Hon. Lisa Cupid  
*Chairwoman, Cobb County Commission*

The Hon. William “Dub” Pearman  
*Mayor, City of Senoia*

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

The Hon. Phil Miller  
*Chairman, Douglas County Commission*

The Hon. Edward Johnson  
*Mayor, City of Fayetteville*

The Hon. Alfred John  
*Chairman, Forsyth County Commission*

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

The Hon. Nicole Love Hendrickson  
*(District Vice Chair)*  
*Chairwoman, Gwinnett County Commission*

The Hon. Richard Higgins  
*Chairman, Hall County Commission*

The Hon. Carlotta Harrell  
*Chair, Henry County Commission*

The Hon. James Kelly  
*Mayor, City of Dallas*

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

### — Citizen Members —

Glenn Page (*District Chair*), Woodstock  
Dr. Mark Berry (*Secretary/Treasurer*), Atlanta  
Pam Burnett, Marietta

Albert Edwards, DeKalb County  
Benjamin Jordan, Decatur  
Gerald Pouncey, Jr., Atlanta  
Sara Ray, Cobb County

Darrell Rochester, Hall County  
Tim Thoms, Fayetteville  
Dave Williams, Suwanee

# A Letter from Our Chairman

Our region continues to be recognized as a great place to live, work, and visit. Economists at the National Association of Realtors recently announced the metro Atlanta area as the *Best Place to Buy a House in 2023*. And, Money magazine named Atlanta as the *Best Place to Live in America* in October 2022. This is reinforced by the latest population figures announced by the Atlanta Regional Commission showing that from April 2022 to April 2023, the 11-county region added 66,730 residents to its current population of 5.16 million.

As our region grows, so does the importance of the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District's role in coordinating the water planning for our 15 counties and 96 cities. Responsible, cooperative management of our water resources and timely investments in water infrastructure continue to be critical for our region's economic vitality and quality of life.

This year we worked with our regional utilities and local governments to implement the 2022 Water Resources Management Plan. The plan provides our communities with valuable guidance, tools, and resources to build on our legacy of smart planning to support water efficiency and stewardship. It is one of the most comprehensive regional water management plans in the country, and it's making a difference.

For over two decades, our communities' united focus on water conservation and efficiency has helped reduce per capita water use in our region by more than 30 percent, even with population increases. This year, we continued building on this achievement with our partner communities enacting new plan components.

One notable change in the 2022 Plan is a District-wide requirement for local governments to update plumbing codes to incorporate readily available high-efficiency products on the market. Effective January 1, 2024, newly constructed residential and renovated buildings will require the installation of high-efficiency water fixtures, appliances, and irrigation equipment. These changes are expected to save thousands of gallons of water per home annually - also saving consumers money on their utility bills.

In July, the District launched a new rebate program to help home-

owners invest in Smart Leak Detection Systems (SLDs) to better manage home water use. Adding to similar tools offered by some partner utilities, the program also builds on the success of our ongoing rebate program for ultra-high-efficiency toilets. Since this program began in 2008, more than 150,000 inefficient toilets have been replaced with low-flow and ultra-high-efficiency models.

In October, the District was recognized by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for 15 years as an EPA WaterSense® partner and received a 6th consecutive Sustained Excellence Award for promoting water efficiency and the WaterSense program. Staff continues exploring creative ways to encourage water stewardship. We also recently updated the District website to improve access to information and resources, and better communicate our region's water story. The District's outreach and education programs reached thousands in 2023!

While water efficiency is a key District priority, we're also doing important work with communities to protect our watersheds and properly manage stormwater - a vital part of replenishing our water supply. In June, the District joined the Council for Quality Growth in hosting a first-of-its-kind Stormwater Workshop. Developers, engineers, planners, public officials, and water industry experts came together to share ideas and perspectives focused on metro Atlanta's stormwater management and flooding challenges.

Asset management is becoming increasingly important to evaluate the condition of our water infrastructure, as well as plan and fund critical repairs and replacements. Looking ahead, the District is interested in working with our partners to better inform residents about the importance of investing in our aging infrastructure to support these essential services.

I'm so proud to call this region home and serve as Chairman of the Metro Water District Governing Board. I'm grateful for the dedicated service and valuable contributions of my colleagues on the Board and the expertise of our utility partners and staff. Together, we serve one of the most integral organizations for sustaining the quality of life in our region today and improving it for generations to come.

Chairman Glenn Page





# Stakeholder Engagement

While the District uses science, data, and good stewardship to guide planning for regional water management, it appreciates and values the volunteers and water professionals who make up their core stakeholder groups providing critical input and feedback. With the 2022 Plan complete, the District shifted their stakeholder engagement focus in 2023 from “plan update” mode to providing learning opportunities, including quality tours and other ways to develop a greater understanding of our shared water resources.

Three key groups – the Governing Board, the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), and the Basin Advisory Councils (BAC) – work together to create, analyze, and approve plan action items throughout the planning process. The Governing Board sets directives during the planning process; the TCC, made up of water professionals from the District’s utilities and water authorities, provides feedback and expertise on plan requirements; and the BAC members provide public stakeholder input from a diversity of perspectives from across the region.

In 2024, the District’s stakeholder groups will begin revisiting policy goals and planning principles in preparation for the next update of the Plan scheduled for 2027.



# Integrated Water Resources Planning

Since 2003, the Metro Water District has maintained and updated the Water Resources Management Plan (Plan). With each update, the District continues to improve the Plan by incorporating innovative policies and best practices, as well as the latest science, data, and research available.

## Diving Into New Action Items

Water experts, utilities, and residents throughout the metro Atlanta area collaborated to develop the regional 2022 Water Resources Management Plan and dove into implementing new strategies in 2023. The Metro Water District kicked off this collaborative effort with a series of Intergovernmental Coordination meetings across the District in January and February. The team provided an overview of new action items, answered questions, and discussed resources available to assist utility and government partners with implementation.

## Slowing the Flow: Region Adopts New Efficiency Codes and a Smart Leak Detector Rebate Program

A key conservation strategy in the 2022 Water Resources Management Plan is the adoption of local ordinances requiring water-efficient plumbing fixtures, equipment, and irrigation system components that are readily available in the marketplace. The updated codes, effective January 1, 2024, apply to the new construction of homes and multi-family properties, as well as building renovations. The adoption of the indoor and outdoor residential plumbing code changes could save thousands of gallons of water per home annually.

In July, the District launched a new rebate program to help homeowners invest in Smart Leak Detection Systems (SLDs) and better manage their home water use, offering customers of participating utilities a rebate of up to \$100 for the purchase and installation of a new leak detection device. Smart leak detection devices range from moisture sensors to more complex models that allow customers to remotely shut off their water. Many utilities have installed smart water meters on their systems providing customers with online access to monitor their water use and receive alerts for suspected leaks.

## District and Council for Quality Growth Make a Splash with Inaugural Stormwater Workshop

In 2022, the District and the Council for Quality Growth formed the Stormwater Working Group – a collaborative effort to support quality, livable communities and good management of stormwater that protects human life, property, and natural resources. Through this partnership, the group issued the following joint statement:

*Recent litigation wins have helped ensure the metro Atlanta region's long-term water supply to support economic vitality, quality of life, and progress. Good management of stormwater helps protect human life, property, and natural resources. As more of metro Atlanta urbanizes and is more densely developed, robust stormwater infrastructure improves water quality, mitigates flooding, and protects ecosystems. And as the intensity and frequency of storms increases, we must take collaborative action to improve the region's stormwater management practices and policies – to ensure our continued quality of life.*

Building on this joint commitment, the group hosted a first-of-its-kind Stormwater Workshop in June 2023. Over 70 developers, engineers, planners, public officials, and water industry experts came together to build relationships and learn about the past, present, and future of land use planning, climate, and metro Atlanta's stormwater management and flooding challenges. The workshop was a productive next step in this joint effort to take actions toward improving the region's stormwater management practices and policies... because "Stormwater Won't Work Until We Do!"



## Surveying Surface Water Quality: Wet Weather Septic System Study Set for 2024

The District developed the Wet Weather Septic System Impact to Surface Water Quality Study with the support of the University of Georgia Research Foundation. The study to be released in 2024 will assess the potential connection between septic systems and poor surface water quality during wet weather using technology and sampling methods focused on nutrients, fecal indicator bacteria and microbial source tracking (MST) markers and will build on the findings of the 2019 Septic System Impacts to Surface Water Quality Study conducted during dry weather events.

Moving forward, the District Governing Board has considered implementing additional required actions to improve surface water quality across the region. These studies will determine what, if any, measures might provide benefits to water quality in the region.



# Education and Public Awareness

Education and public awareness are central components to the District's planning efforts. To meet the goals of raising awareness of the need to protect and conserve our water resources, the District continues to host engaging and interactive events and contests for the public and support water providers and local governments with outstanding educational resources, program assistance, and engagement opportunities.

## Raising a Glass to 15 years of Partnership with EPA WaterSense

The District received its sixth consecutive Sustained Excellence Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) WaterSense® program for its long-standing dedication to water conservation, collaboration, WaterSense outreach, and water resources education. This is the ninth year the District has been recognized for its WaterSense partnership efforts by the EPA. The District was honored in October during the annual WaterSmart Innovations Conference and Exposition in Las Vegas, alongside organizations from across the U.S., for their commitment to promoting WaterSense and water efficiency in 2022.

## 11 Years Running: 700+ Registered for the Annual Water Drop Dash

In March 2023, the District celebrated the 11th annual Water Drop Dash with an in-person 5k and virtual 10k race with over 700 runners registered. Presented in partnership with the Chattahoochee Nature Center, the Water Drop Dash is a fun and family-friendly way to learn about the importance of water conservation to the region and serves as a way to promote the EPA's annual national awareness campaign, Fix a Leak Week.

Many utility and community partners joined the District for a post-race, outdoor Water Festival where attendees learned about Fix-a-Leak Week and received free items to help find, fix, and prevent leaks, including new toilet flappers and a "how-to" Flip Your Flapper graphic guide.

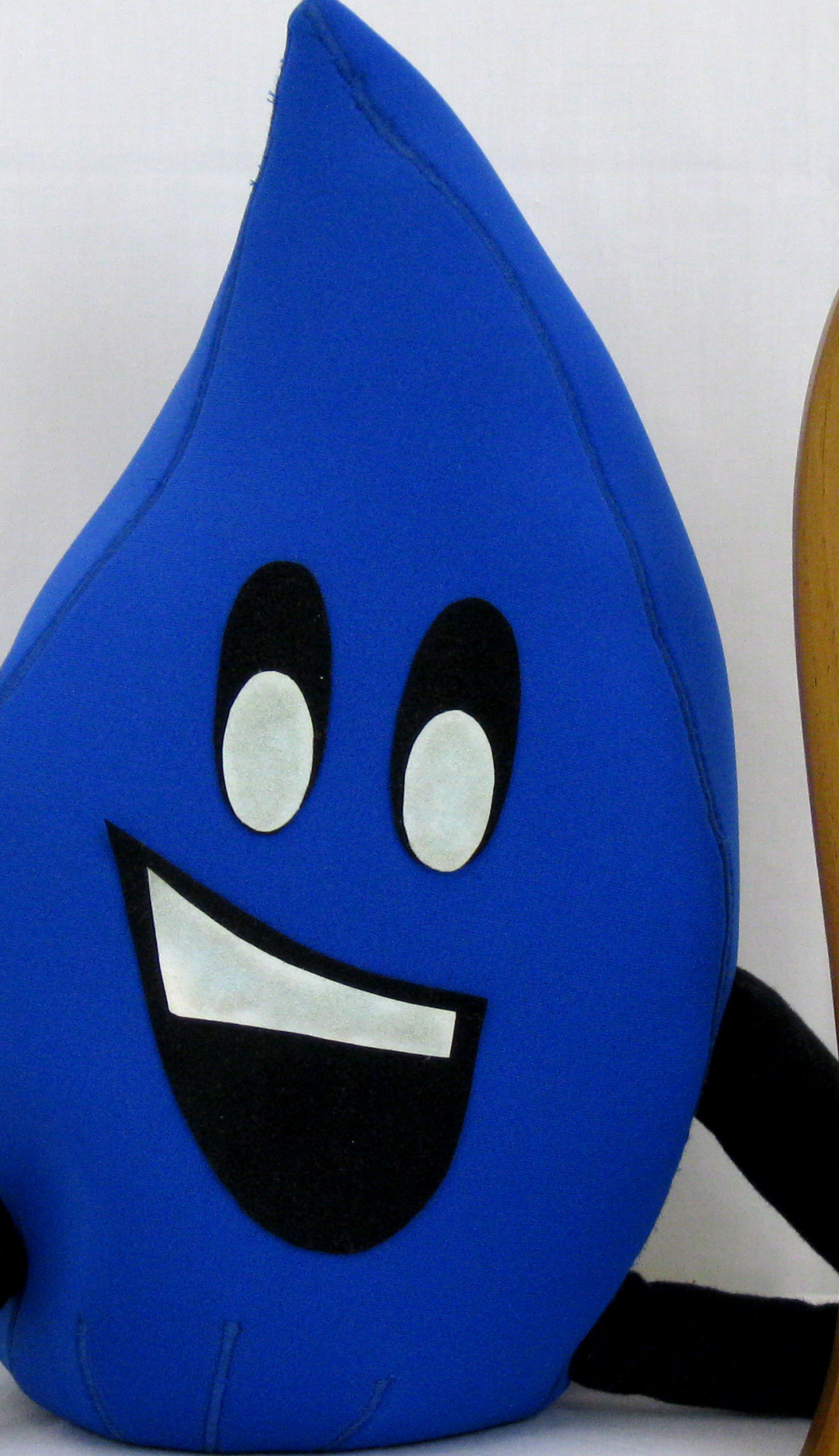
## Cascading Information through New Website and Social Media

The District's website serves as a source of valuable information for local governments, residents, educators, and the general public. This fall the District launched a new streamlined website featuring reorganized information and resources to support different audiences and enhanced functionality to better serve the region. Key features include: real-time water data, Technical Assistance Program resources, educational resources for teachers, residents and businesses, and a searchable portal to provide board, committee and council members with information about meetings and plans.

## Drops of Humor for a Serious Issue

Nearly 100 guests joined us in October at Dad's Garage Theatre for an evening of improv comedy in honor of "Imagine a Day Without Water." The event was "dripping" with water-saving information, materials, games, and comedy performed in partnership with the Georgia Association of Water Professionals. The second half of the show included a panel of water experts using improv to share how to find and fix leaks, Shower Better, and other fun water conservation initiatives.





# Financials for 2023

The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District operated on a calendar-year budget, with revenues coming from local government dues (\$1,398,593) and state funding from the Georgia General Assembly (\$250,000).

In 2023, Miscellaneous Fees were reduced to reflect fewer submittals than anticipated to the Post Construction Stormwater Technical Assistance Program. Contract expenses for the Wet Weather Septic System Impact to Surface Water Quality Study increased to reflect the shift of work performed in 2023 and completion of the study. The Public Awareness/Education line item increased to accommodate a new contract with Georgia Public Broadcasting to develop a Virtual Learning Journey project related to water education for a state-wide audience.

The District will continue to maintain a consistent dues rate of \$0.25 per capita for future years and fund the future work for the 2027 Water Resource Management Plan Update that will begin in 2025. The District strives to maintain a minimum fund balance of \$300,000 for operating contingencies.

	2023 Budget Approved June 1, 2022	2023 Budget Approved December 13, 2023
<b>Beginning Fund Balance (Estimated)</b> . . . . .		<b>\$948,686</b>
<b>Revenues</b>		
State Funding (Appropriations) . . . . .	\$250,000	\$250,000
Local Dues (2010 Census at \$0.25 per capita) . . . . .	\$1,398,593	\$1,398,593
Interest Income . . . . .	\$250	\$250
Misc. Fees . . . . .	\$20,000	\$9,000
<b>Total Revenues</b> . . . . .	<b>\$1,668,843</b>	<b>\$1,657,843</b>
<b>Expenses by Type</b>		
Chairman's Allowance . . . . .	\$3,000	\$2,000
Salaries . . . . .	\$578,073	\$560,000
Fringe Benefits . . . . .	\$336,439	\$263,200
Overhead . . . . .	\$396,898	\$367,970
Contracts . . . . .	\$140,000	\$150,000
Septic Study – Wet Weather . . . . .	\$40,000	\$157,199
Miscellaneous Operating . . . . .	\$75,000	\$90,000
Public Awareness / Education . . . . .	\$100,000	\$110,000
<b>Total Expenses</b> . . . . .	<b>\$1,669,410</b>	<b>\$1,700,369</b>
<b>Projected Ending Fund Balance</b> . . . . .		<b>\$906,160</b>



Photo credit: James Cole



## **Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District**

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.

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