



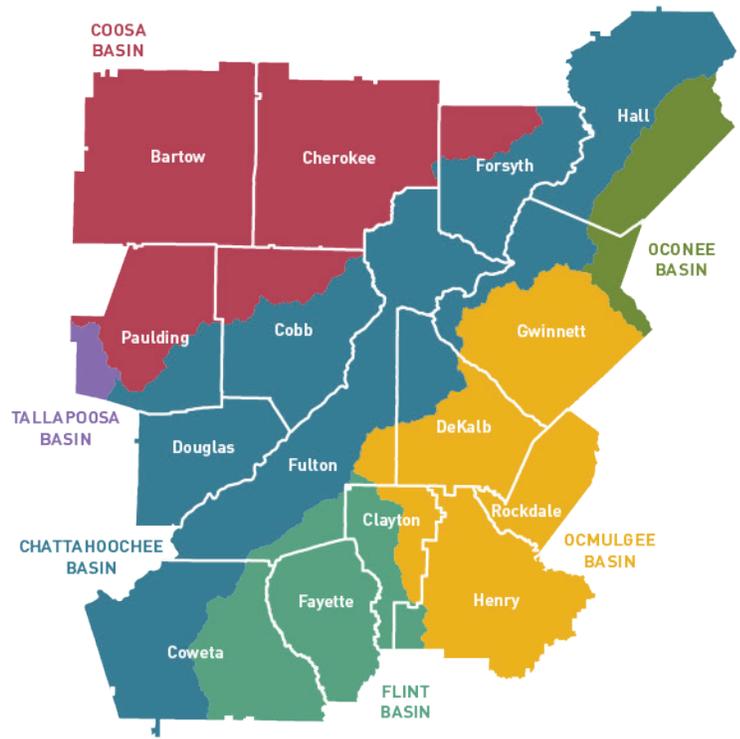
# 2021 Activities & Progress Report

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 2021, the District continued work on its third update of the District Plan, which is to be completed by 2022.



## 2021 Governing Board Members

### — Elected Officials —

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

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

**The Hon. Cindy Jones Mills**  
*Chairwoman, Forsyth County Commission*

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

**The Hon. Nicole Love Hendrickson**  
*Chairwoman, Gwinnett County Commission*

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

**The Hon. Carlotta Harrell**  
*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**, Alpharetta  
**Gerald Pouncey, Jr.**, Atlanta  
**Tim Thoms**, Fayetteville

Cover photo credit: Kelli Sullivan of Stockbridge, GA

# Drawing Inspiration from the Past

Most major cities were formed around access to water and the ports that facilitated trade. Atlanta, however was born at the crossroads of rail lines. Access to the plentiful, clean water necessary for living, working, and playing wasn't a focus at its founding, but our thriving metropolis managed to spring up and become the economic and cultural powerhouse that it is today.

In the late 1990s to early 2000s, our region found itself at another crossroads where both the quality and quantity of our water were threatening our future vitality. Our region faced serious water quality challenges while needing to plan for increasing water supply needs for a growing population. We were compelled to make water a major focus. Forward-thinking individuals from government, business, and environmental communities made the connection that a clean and plentiful water supply was the linchpin for metro Atlanta's continued growth and economic prosperity. The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (the District) was created to effect these goals.

When the District was formed by the Georgia General Assembly in 2001, there was no coordinated regional plan for conserving and managing safe drinking water, or for responsibly collecting and treating wastewater. But the District changed that. It created the structure that brought hundreds of stakeholders with varied perspectives and interests together from across a broad geographical area and provided the framework for piecing together all the public comments, technical expertise, and leadership that produced the first set of plans.

Since 2001, 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 region. We are widely recognized for our progressive approach to water conservation and requirements for watershed protection. With each update of the Plan, we and our utility partners innovate and improve. Because of our intentional planning and implementation, the region's supplies have been extended. In addition, our watersheds are being protected through the impactful and significant collection of integrated water resource stewardship measures created by the District and implemented by its 110 jurisdictions.

As the General Manager of the Cobb County-Marietta Water Authority and a professional in the industry for 35 years, I have been privileged to be a part of the District from the beginning. I have participated in every iteration of the Plan, collaborating with other utility leaders and helping District staff create a suite of action items that produce real regional change, and that are, at the same time, respectful of the local utilities' finances. In fact, it is incumbent on each utility to implement the plan

requirements we help create. That's the beauty of the District's planning process – meaningful collaboration and dedicated implementation leading to real results.

As I reflect on the last 20 years, I am reminded of everything - and everyone – that got us where we are today. I think about the people - some of the best professionals our industry has to offer those who have come and gone and the many who are still working hard planning for our future. I think about the successes we've achieved and the awards we've won. And I think about the work that still needs to be completed: the investment still to be made and the public still to be reached.

I am also reminded that planning and successful outcomes take time. This year, in one of the many courtroom battles the District has been involved with (some older than the District itself), we emerged victorious when the United States Supreme Court dismissed the claims of our downstream neighbor. Florida had claimed that our overconsumption caused harm to wildlife and the collapse of Florida's oyster fisheries in Apalachicola Bay, but the court found quite the opposite. The court wrote that Florida failed to prove "that Georgia's alleged overconsumption played more than a trivial role in the collapse of Florida's oyster fisheries." It was due in part to the hard work of the District and the investment and effort made at the local level to reduce per capita water use by more than 30 percent that were instrumental in the outcome of this most important case.

Still, we do not rest - we reset. We continue to work to uphold the Court's directive that, "Georgia has an obligation to make reasonable use of basin waters in order to help conserve that increasingly scarce resource."

On behalf of the Governing Board, staff, and all our partners and stakeholders, we are proactively looking ahead to the future. We anticipate that our next 20 years will bring unknown challenges. We expect that we will face increased and longer cycles of drought, offset by more intense rainfall, along with predicted and unprecedented population growth for the Atlanta region. It is our goal and keen desire to continue to be innovative and achieve results, while keeping that strong connection to water for the sake of our region and everything – and everyone – in it.



Glenn Page  
*Metro Water District Chair*



# A History of the Metro Water District



The District is created by the Georgia General Assembly (SB 130).



First suite of long-term management plans is created to address Water Supply and Water Conservation, Wastewater and Stormwater Management.



The District begins to look critically at planning for septic systems in the metro area.

2001

2002

2003

2004

2005

2006

The long-term management plans are launched into action by our partner utilities, authorities and jurisdictions.

The Georgia General Assembly passes the Comprehensive Water Management Planning Act, charging GA EPD with drafting Georgia's first comprehensive statewide water plan.

The first Short-term Wastewater Plan is created to address immediate concerns with returns to the watershed.



All local governments in the District are required to adopt the suite of six model stormwater ordinances.



The District undertakes the first update of the plans, which include additional conservation measures.

Major flooding event highlights the variability of metro Atlanta's rainfall.



The District launches My Drop Counts, a water conservation campaign to encourage water saving in homes, schools and businesses in the metro area.

The District holds first joint meeting of the region's six Basin Advisory Councils.



Major drought changes how local utilities and authorities think about their water supply, and also changes customers' water-use behaviors.

2007

2008

2009

2010

2011



The Toilet Rebate Program is created to encourage the replacement of inefficient, water-guzzling toilets.



The Georgia Water Stewardship Act is signed, requiring all local governments to adopt or amend local ordinances to uniformly restrict outdoor water use for landscapes between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., as well as updating the local plumbing code to include WaterSense labeled high-efficiency fixtures.

The Water Supply / Water Conservation Plan is amended to include additional conservation measures for the Lanier and Chattahoochee basins.

# A History of the Metro Water District



The District hosts first annual Water Drop Dash 5K Race and Festival.



District utilities reach the collective milestone of replacing 100,000 toilets.

Projected water demands for 2050 decrease significantly compared to previous projections.

2012

2013

2014

2015

2016

The District hosts first annual Legislative Breakfast at the State Capitol.

The District launches the Technical Assistance Program for local governments, utilities and authorities.

The District celebrates 15 years with the inaugural STREAM Awards for Programs and Projects of Excellence.

The District utilities replaced nearly 120,000 toilets.

The District hosts Storm The Watershed 5K/15K.



The District staff begin working with stakeholders on the second update of the Plans.

The District undertakes a Climate Resiliency Study to inform the Plan update.

The District rebrands with a new, modern logo.



The District launched the Society of Intentionally Dry Lawns during major Level 2 drought.

First Integrated Water Resource Management Plan includes over 50 action items that aim to protect and conserve our shared water resources.

The District launched the successful Septic Realtor Trainings.

To address emerging issues the District undertook new studies and pilot projects, including the Septic System Impacts to Surface Water Quality Study and Residential New Homes Water Use Study.

Updated Post-Construction Stormwater Management Ordinance safeguards public health and protect water resources.

The District enhanced the Toilet Rebate Program to include multi-family properties and improve water efficiency in multifamily residential.

Case Dismissed! The Supreme Court of the United States dismisses Florida's case against Georgia regarding our water use in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Basin.

The District hosted Live Exploration: Georgia's Water in partnership with Georgia Public Broadcasting, educating over 81,000 kids, teachers, and parents across our state and beyond.

2017

2018

2019

2020

2021

The District relaunched My Drop Counts Business Pledge and expanded the Home Pledge to include residents statewide.

The District received its first US EPA WaterSense Sustained Excellence Award.



The District hosted the first-ever virtual Water Drop Dash 5k with over 250 participating at their own pace during EPA WaterSense Fix a Leak Week.

The District embarked on innovative stormwater forecasting for the 2022 Plan update that will guide planning that promotes holistic watershed and stormwater management for resilience, public safety, and watershed health.

The District updated Source Water Assessment Plans (SWAPs) for 26 water providers, 39 water supply watersheds, and 42 public drinking water intakes that will help utilities identify potential sources of contamination to their drinking water supplies.

# 20 Years of Successes and Accomplishments

*We are proud of the work we have accomplished together with our stake*

**1**

1 active integrated Water Resource Management Plan to prepare the region for long term success and to protect and ensure the water resources we need to thrive.

**100**

The District has collaborated with over 100 community groups, non-profits, environmental and advocacy groups, and partners in the agriculture industry and business community.

**150,000**

Over 150,000 inefficient toilets replaced in the region.

**3,700**

Over 3,700 pledges to conserve water have been made by residents across the state.

**8,000**

Nearly 8,000 essays submitted for the Middle School Essay Contest.

**500**

Over 500 videos submitted for the High School Video Contest.

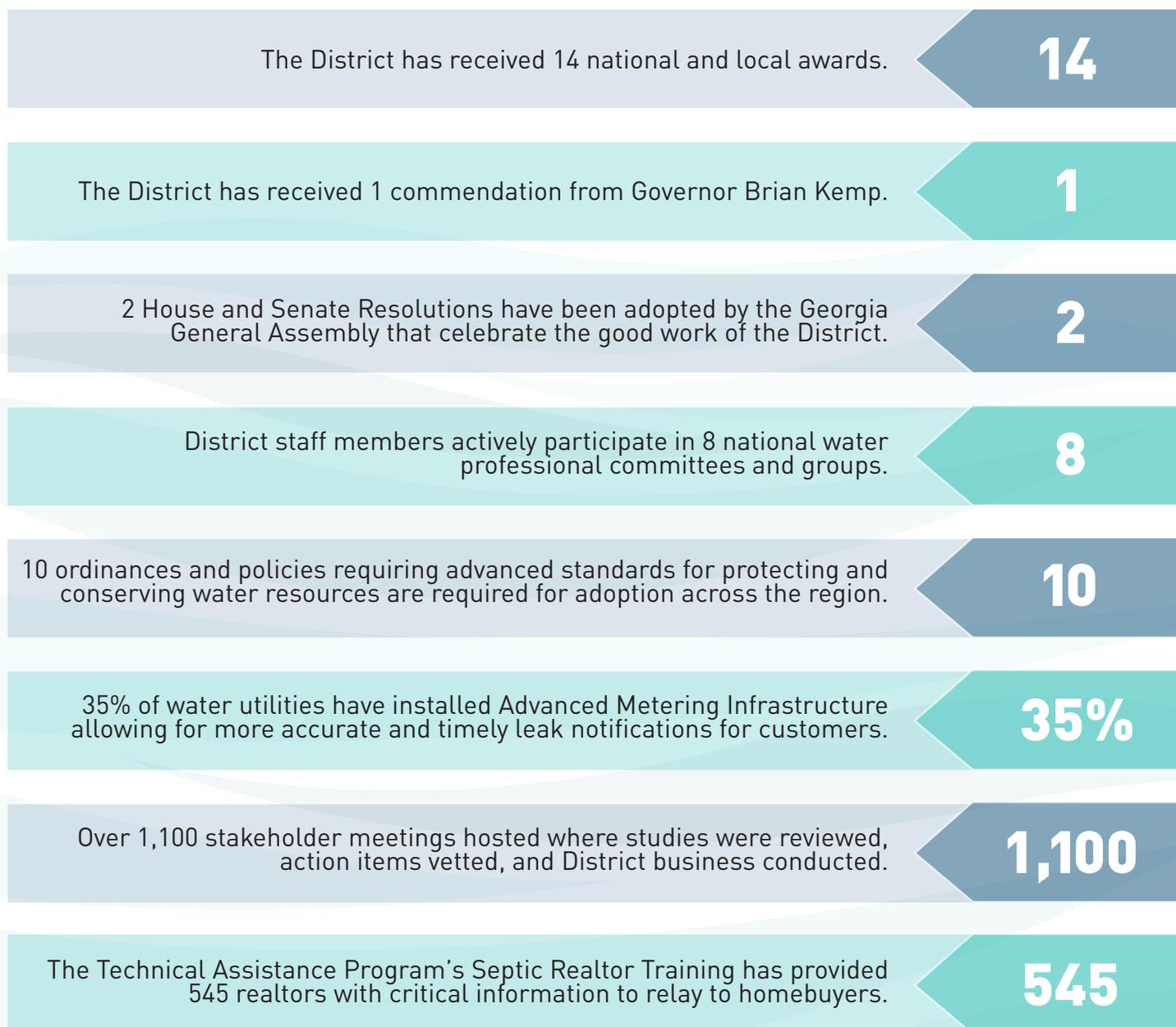
**1,200**

1,200 photos submitted for the Water Reflections Calendar Contest.

**15,600**

Over 15,600 miles run by the thousands of participants in the Water Drop Dash over 10 years.

*holder groups, member utilities and water authorities, and partners.*





# Planning in the Present

## The Water Resources Management Plan

Since 2003, the Metro Water District has maintained and updated the Water Resource 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. 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 the Plan continues that legacy.

Currently, the District is embarking on the third update of the Plan, slated for approval in 2022. The update 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. Additionally, it will include a stormwater forecast – the first of its kind – that will guide planning that promotes holistic watershed and stormwater management for resilience, public safety, and watershed health.

In 2021, the District coordinated with over 50 water and wastewater utilities to develop draft facility expansion plans for the region's treatment facilities, which will be released for stakeholder review. Through its stakeholder processes, the District proposed new action items for consideration that would advance the District's leadership in water conservation and efficiency.

Photo credit: Paul Daniel of Lawrenceville, GA

## Stakeholder Engagement

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 Technical Coordinating Committee, and the Basin Advisory Councils – work together to create, analyze, and approve Plan action items throughout the planning process. The Governing Board sets directives during the plan cycle; the Technical Coordinating Committee, made up of water professionals from the District’s utilities and water authorities, provide feedback and expertise on Plan requirements; and the Basin Advisory Councils provide public stakeholder input from a diversity of perspectives from across the region. As the District works toward completing the update of the Plan, continued collaboration with stakeholders is important to creating data-driven and implementable action items that address regional issues.

In 2021, the District’s stakeholder groups continued with virtual meetings, and the District created additional avenues for virtual engagement. The District implemented an annual planning meeting with the Basin Advisory Councils’ Chairs at the beginning of 2021. Staff and Basin Advisory Chairs discussed the importance of the 2021 membership drive and developed a marketing plan for social media, a PSA-style commercial that explained the role of a BAC member, and a friendly membership drive competition among the Chairs. BAC membership increased to 248 total members across all Basins. In a Plan update year, BAC feedback provides critical community perspectives from across the District.

The Technical Coordinating Committee also met virtually in 2021. TCC members discussed Plan update items like the drought response guide, proposed District Plan action items, drought tolerant turfgrass, and more.

While the continued use of virtual platforms has its challenges, the District’s stakeholder groups have continued to be productive and engaged. Dialogue and feedback occur naturally, as virtual chats and conversation enable stakeholders to continue communication during and after presentations. The continued use of virtual platforms has allowed collaboration to continue so that the 2022 Plan Update remains on schedule.

## Education and Public Awareness

Education and communication are central components to the Metro Water District’s planning efforts. For 20 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. Most of this year, as in 2020, many District and utility partner events were cancelled due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Education and communication efforts looked a little different, but District staff and utility partners continued to provide engaging educational programming.

The Water Drop Dash continued with a hybrid in-person and virtual format. The race’s annual water festival was held virtually, which allowed utility partners from across the District to participate in and cross-promote each other’s programming during a week of activities in celebration of Fix a Leak Week.

The District worked closely with Georgia Public Broadcasting and many regional partners to create a live program focused completely on Georgia’s water story. It was broadcast during National Drinking Water Week and received 81,000 views in classrooms and homes across the state. Finally, the District’s annual contests continued with high participation in the High School Video Contest and the Water Reflections Calendar Contest.



Photo credit: Marilyn Nieves of Decatur, GA

# Shaping the Future

Atlanta's water story is unique. In these last twenty years, there have been incredible successes for the District and many challenges we have overcome. In particular, our water conservation and efficiency efforts have led to tremendous results in reducing water use across our region. This has been accomplished through a myriad of programs, including:

- Education programs such as My Drop Counts,
- Utility investments including leak detection and repair,
- Tiered residential water rates that increase as more water is used, helping homeowners recognize water as a valued resource, and
- Incentives such as toilet rebates.

Since 2000, per capita water use has decreased by more than 30 percent. And, our water withdrawals are lower today than they were when the District was formed twenty years ago.

Key to our success is that the Plan is enforced by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division. This ensures practices are implemented uniformly across all jurisdictions, leveling the playing field so that all communities are addressing conservation and efficiency. And, because our Plan also addresses wastewater and stormwater management practices, we are holistically protecting our water resources and increasing our resilience.

But while we are proud of these accomplishments, we know that our story is still being written. We expect our water related challenges to continue. As I talk with our partner utilities, fellow water planners, and community leaders, common themes emerge surrounding resilience, the need to invest in aging infrastructure, and how to staff the water industry of the future.

We must plan for the continued cycle of floods and droughts – looking to what's next in maintaining a resilient water supply during drought, returning highly treated wastewater back to its source, and effectively managing stormwater through more intense rainfall.

Utilities are increasingly concerned about attracting new workers to serve in the water industry. We need water heroes — plant operators, maintenance workers, engineers, utility directors/management, planners, system thinkers — to serve our communities. And, they need to be recognized for the vital role they play in maintaining a resilient water supply and supporting our thriving region. We must have the water supply, the infrastructure, and the people to make it all work.

We've come a long way in 20 years. But, we can't rest on our laurels. In some ways, the next 20 will be more challenging due to the long-term nature of infrastructure investment needs, climate change, and population growth as we prosper as a region. The District will continue to be a leader in education to help generations understand the value of water and importance of conservation.

Our holistic and collaborative approach to planning as a region will advance conservation, increase efficiency, improve wastewater quality, effectively manage stormwater, and protect watersheds. All of these are crucial for sustaining our limited water supply today and for the future of our region. I'm honored to help lead the District into the future and confident we'll build on our past success to keep the metropolitan Atlanta region at the forefront of effective water planning and policy implementation.



Katherine Zitsch  
*Director, Metro Water District*



Photo credit: Stella Spyrou

# Financials for 2021

The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District operated on a calendar-year budget, with revenues coming from local government dues (\$1,208,186) and state funding from the Georgia General Assembly (\$750,000) to support annual program administration and the development of the 2022 Water Resource Management Plan Update.

In June 2020, the District Governing Board approved a per capita dues increase of \$0.30 up from \$0.25 in 2019 to support the 2022 Plan Update. At the time, the budget conservatively assumed the State of Georgia would provide only \$172,000 in its FY21 appropriations to the District. However, after the budget was approved, the State finalized its FY21 budget providing the District with \$750,000 (\$200,000 for annual administration funding plus an additional \$550,000 for Plan Update expenses) in state appropriations. The District has typically been awarded additional funding during the Plan

update cycle. This additional funding allowed the Governing Board to modify the prior approved dues rate, thereby lowering the burden on local dues payers. The lowered, \$0.25 per capita dues for 2021 was approved on August 26, 2020.

## 2022 Financials

In June of 2021, the Metro Water District Governing Board adopted a final budget of \$1,961,387 for 2022, with the majority of revenues coming from local governments (\$1,208,186) and the state (\$250,000). Local government dues for 2022 will remain at \$0.25 per capita (based on the 2010 Census). The District strives to maintain a minimum fund balance of \$300,000 for operating contingencies. Below is a review of the revenues and expenses for 2021. This accounting is subject to adjustment after fiscal year-end close and an independent audit.

	2021 Budget Approved June 8, 2020	2021 Budget Approved December 1, 2021
<b>Beginning Fund Balance (Estimated)</b>	<b>\$513,330</b>	<b>\$757,485</b>
<b>Revenues</b>		
State Funding (Appropriations)	\$172,000	\$750,000
State Funding (GEFA)	-	-
Source Water Assessment Plan Grant (GEFA/DNR)	-	-
Local Dues (2010 Census at \$0.25 per capita)	\$1,449,823	\$1,208,186
Interest Income	\$1,000	\$1,000
Misc. Fees	\$45,000	\$67,120
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$1,667,823</b>	<b>\$2,026,306</b>
<b>Expenses by Type</b>		
Chairman's Allowance	\$3,000	\$3,300
Salaries	\$514,666	\$514,666
Fringe Benefits	\$303,653	\$284,096
Overhead	\$338,784	\$325,096
Contracts	\$365,000	\$650,000
Miscellaneous Operating	\$85,000	\$110,000
Public Awareness / Education	\$75,000	\$100,000
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$1,685,103</b>	<b>\$1,986,858</b>
<b>Projected Ending Fund Balance</b>	<b>\$496,050</b>	<b>\$796,933</b>



**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)**