



*Working together to share a common resource.*

# News Release

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## **ACF STAKEHOLDERS AGREE ON SUSTAINABLE WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN**

*Consensus-Driven Process Yields Recommendations for Equitably Managing Water in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin*

*Group Formally Recommends Creation of Transition Council to Develop a Framework for Basin Management Institution*

APALACHICOLA, Fla. – May 13, 2015 – ACF Stakeholders, Inc. (ACFS) has completed and unanimously approved a Sustainable Water Management Plan (SWMP) for equitably managing water in the Apalachicola, Chattahoochee and Flint River Basin, including its impact on the Apalachicola Bay.

Since 2009, ACFS, a grassroots organization that represents the spectrum of water interests throughout the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) river basin, has been working toward a SWMP based on good data and consensus. The group has raised more than \$1.7 million to accumulate and model the data necessary to develop this consensus-driven plan.

The Plan will be shared with the governors of Alabama, Florida and Georgia, as well as other relevant state offices and agencies. It will also be shared with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is responsible for managing the chain of reservoirs along the Chattahoochee River.

After a final two days of debate, the ACFS Governing Board – a body of 56 individuals representing stakeholder organizations from all three states – on Wednesday agreed on a number of recommendations. The major recommendations are:

1. Alabama, Florida and Georgia should collaboratively establish a transboundary water management institution to serve as a data clearinghouse; facilitate coordination, consensus building and conflict resolution; and support development of basin-level water management plans.

2. Each state should pursue and achieve sustainable water use and return policies. Water users throughout the basin should identify and implement conservation measures and water efficient policies. Tracking and reporting is critical to achieve actual improvements.
3. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should consider adopting the following, as a package of changes, to its management of the ACF reservoirs to utilize storage more efficiently during ordinary conditions, mitigate drought impacts, and promptly restore conditions after droughts. The suggested changes include:
  - a. Raise the winter pool 4.5 feet at West Point Lake to increase water storage that can be used to provide benefits basin-wide.
  - b. Define new zones to coincide with the USACE reservoir recreational impact zones and then only release water from an upstream reservoir when the downstream reservoir is in a lower zone.
  - c. Adjust hydropower release requirements to achieve more operational flexibility with respect to other water uses.
  - d. Provide two pulsed releases – in May and July – timed to support environmental flow requirements, improved navigation conditions in the Apalachicola River, and salinity regimes favorable to oysters in the Apalachicola Bay.
4. The Army Corps of Engineers should study and, if feasible, implement a 2-foot increase in the pool level at Lake Lanier, increasing water storage by 7 percent, to the benefit of all users in the basin.
5. Local, state and federal decision makers should develop consistent drought management plans that define drought conditions, identify drought response triggers, delineates responsibilities of various water use sectors and documents changes in operational strategies in response to drought conditions. ACFS further encourages USACE to incorporate predictive drought indicators into the pending revision of the Water Control Manual.
6. Various state and federal agencies should develop more and more consistent information about the river basin and bay to promote better decision making in the future. ACFS encountered challenging gaps in scientific and technical information on the basin during the course of its work and suggests a specific list of studies that, if completed, would support better decision-making in the future.

“It is entirely possible to manage and share the water in this river basin, but we all need to work together to accomplish that,” ACFS Board Chair Betty Webb said. “Our plan lights a path to changing the way we store water and operate the reservoir system, combined with smarter approaches to using water, and improving stream flows in the river basin and Apalachicola Bay.’

## **Data and Consensus**

ACFS was founded on the idea that a new approach to addressing the ACF basin's water management issues was needed. After more than 20 years, the so-called Water Wars had been waged in courtrooms without a meaningful result. Fresh perspectives and a fresh approach were needed if progress was going to be made.

“We – all 56 Governing Board members – have spent the past four years reviewing the data, asking questions, and debating the alternatives,” Brad Moore, Chair of the ACFS' Technical Coordinating Work Group, said. “This has been as thorough a review of the available information about the ACF Basin and Apalachicola Bay as has ever been conducted by any organization anywhere.”

Every substantive decision made by the ACFS has been unanimous, up to and including approval of the consensus-based plan.

“Satisfying the needs of every stakeholder was critical to achieving a workable plan,” Governing Board member Brad Currey said. “It also took a long time. When any single member could prevent an issue from moving forward, we were diligent to make sure every perspective was fully considered.”

## **ACF Basin Transition Coordinating Council**

While most of the recommendations are designed to change the way that water is stored, shared and used, one recommendation is designed to provide the basis for solving future water-related conflicts.

The Governing Board recommends that the three states and federal representatives work together via a Transition Council to establish a framework for creating a transboundary water management institution that can serve a number of needs. The most critical of these needs involves addressing the highly fragmented local and regional water management plans and entities by providing a forum for collaboratively planning water management on a basin-wide level.

“A transboundary organization is an incredible tool for working to solve basin-level water issues before they become crises,” Governing Board member Chad Taylor said. “Congress has recommended it, and we have seen many, many examples of where similar organizations have had great success in other river basins.”

Transboundary water management institutions have successfully guided management of shared water resources in the US since the 1960s, notably overseeing water management programs in the Great Lakes, Gulf of Mexico and the country's major river basins. These interstate commissions take different forms and have different powers, but share the goal of promoting sustainable water management for all stakeholders.

This recommendation was developed by The University Collaborative, a consortium of universities ACFS formed in 2011 to research the basin-wide management mechanisms. It

includes professors, lawyers and graduate students from the University of Florida, Florida State University, Auburn University, Albany State University and the University of Georgia.

**ACF Stakeholders, Inc.** is a group of water users in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) river basin of Alabama, Florida and Georgia who are working together for sustainable water management.

The Governing Board is comprised of 56 individuals representing all aspects of the river basin's economic, agricultural, aquacultural, recreational and environmental concerns. Membership on the board is divided equally among the four ACF sub-basins and includes membership from Alabama, Florida and Georgia.