Upper Savannah River Basin Council
Phase 1 Progress Report

February 2024

1.0 Introduction

The South Carolina State Water Planning Framework requires River Basin Councils (RBCs) to prepare and submit progress reports after each phase of the river basin plan development. This progress report covers Phase 1 of the Upper Savannah River Basin planning process spanning July 26, 2023 through January 30, 2024.

The Phase 1 Progress Report summarizes the activities and accomplishments of Phase 1, including key milestones reached, and identifies existing and potential issues regarding schedule and funding. Anticipated challenges as the RBC moves into Phase 2 of the planning process are also identified.

2.0 Activities and Accomplishments

2.1 RBC Meetings

Six RBC meetings were held during the Phase 1 planning period. RBC meetings in October and December were abbreviated meetings followed by field trips. All meetings were conducted as hybrid meetings. Most RBC members attended in person, while some members attended meetings virtually using the Zoom platform. Meeting durations ranged from 3 to 4 hours. Meeting summaries and minutes were distributed to meeting attendees.

2.2 Phase 1 Objectives

The objectives of Phase 1 were to:

- introduce the RBC to the river basin planning process;
- provide technical presentations that inform the RBC members on a range of topics critical to the planning process;
- conduct field trips to key locations in the river basin;
- establish planning metrics;
- develop a vision statement and planning goals; and
- select an RBC Chair and Vice Chair.

Although generally considered Phase 2 objectives, the RBC reviewed the Savannah River Basin SWAM model results for the Current Use, Unimpaired Flow, and Permitted and Registered Scenarios during RBC meeting 6 in January 2024.

2.3 Accomplishments

Information Sharing

A variety of technical presentations were delivered during the Phase 1 RBC meetings. Presenters included staff representing several divisions within the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources

(SCDNR), the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC), the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Clemson University, and CDM Smith. Presentation topics included:

- River basin planning and guiding principles
- The State Water Planning Framework and RBC Bylaws
- Water legislation and permitting
- Basin hydrology and monitoring and low flow characteristics
- Groundwater resources of the Upper Savannah River basin
- Land use, population growth, and socioeconomic characteristics of the basin
- Current water use and water demand projection methodology
- State and Upper Savannah River basin climatology
- South Carolina Drought Response Act
- Freshwater aquatic resources
- Duke Power operations
- Friends of Lake Keowee Society
- Georgia's Savannah-Upper Ogeechee Regional Water Plan
- The Savannah River basin surface water quantity model
- Flow-ecology relationships
- "Hydrology 101"
- Current Use, Unimpaired Flow, and Permitted and Registered Scenarios surface water quantity model results

Process and Progress Metrics

The RBC selected 11 process metrics. Process metrics are *benchmarks used to monitor the success or failure of the processes which led to RBC actions*. The selected process metrics are:

1. The process to select RBC members is well documented, transparent, and reflects broad-based outreach.
2. RBCs develop a River Basin Plan by March 2025.
3. RBC meetings adhere to timelines.
4. River Basin Plans are actionable, logical, and address or prevent challenges with a level of detail to be cost-accountable.
5. Information used and generated during the planning process is shared openly, publicly, and is easily accessible.
6. RBC meeting agendas are focused and promote efficient and productive meetings.
7. RBC members are given ample time and support to consider, digest, and understand technical information.

8. Decisions are guided by best available science.
9. Information is presented in an unbiased manner.
10. RBC members are provided equal opportunity to be heard and express their interests, ideas, and concerns.
11. The use and outcomes of models and other tools to assess water availability and evaluate strategies are appropriately documented.

The RBC elected to defer selection of progress metrics until later in the planning process, since they primary relate to implementation of the river basin plan. Progress metrics are *benchmarks used to monitor the success or failure of selected actions taken by an RBC*.

Mission/Vision Statements and Goal Setting

The vision statement developed and adopted by the RBC is:

> *A resilient Upper Savannah River Basin that collaboratively, sustainably, and equitably manages and balances human and ecological needs.*

The goals were approved by motion.

1. *Within 24 months, develop water use strategies, policies, and legislative recommendations for the Upper Savannah River Basin in order to:*
    a. *Ensure water resources are maintained to support current and future human and ecosystem needs.*
    b. *Improve the resiliency of the water resources and help minimize disruptions within the basin.*
    c. *Promote balance between development, industry, and economic growth in areas with adequate water resources.*
    d. *Advocate for responsible land use practices.*
    e. *Identify funding sources.*
2. *Develop and implement an education and communication plan to promote the strategies, policies, and recommendations developed for the Upper Savannah River Basin.*
3. *Enhance collaboration between all stakeholders and water interest groups, including Georgia and the Lower Savannah-Salkehatchie River Basin.*

Selection of the RBC Chair and Vice Chair

The RBC selected Jill Miller of the South Carolina Rural Water Association (representing the At-large interest category) and Jeff Phillips of Greenville Water (representing the Water and Sewer Utilities interest category) as the Chair and Vice Chair, respectively.

Field Trips

The RBC completed two field trips during Phase 1. The first field trip was on October 11, 2023. Prior to lunch and an afternoon meeting, the RBC visited the Simpson Station to learn about agriculture and irrigation research at the Clemson Research Education Centers. The second field trip was on December 13. Following a morning meeting hosted by Duke Energy, the RBC toured the Lake Jocassee Dam and Hydro Facility. Photos from the field trips are shown in Figure 1.

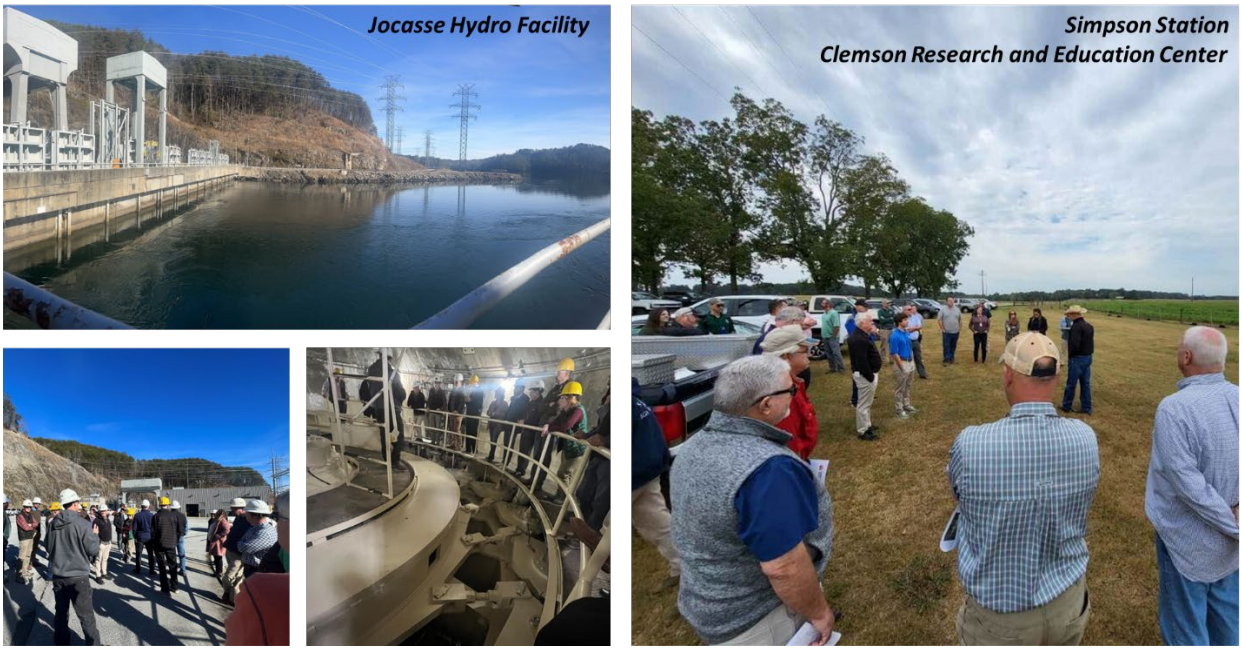

Figure 1. The RBC took fields trips to tour Duke Energy's Jocasse Hydro facility and Dam (left photos) and Clemson's Simpson Station Research and Education Center.

2.4 Activities Not Completed

All activities outlined in the Planning Framework for Phase 1 were completed except the RBC decided to develop progress metrics until later in the planning process.

2.5 Feedback from the RBC

At the end of Phase 1, the RBC members were asked to complete a short survey. The survey was intended to gage effectiveness of the facilitation, content, and format of the meetings; identify topics that merit discussion and/or technical presentations; evaluate the pace of the planning process; and identify challenges or issues. Some of the most significant RBC feedback is provided below.

In response to the question, "***Do you think the information presented in Phase 1 has given you a sufficient level of understanding to make informed planning-level decisions as we move into Phase 2****?",* the majority of the 12 responding RBC members answered "yes". One member responded "I think we have been given a sufficient and non-biased level of information to make decisions." Another member responded "Yes, I would have enjoyed more information about how the different sectors use

water (not just their consumption levels). We talk a lot about the natural indicators of water measurements... what about the human ones?"

In response to the question, "***Do you feel that you have an adequate understanding of how data, models, and other tools will be used to assess water availability, identify shortages, and explore surface water issues and concerns during Phase 2?"***, All 12 responding RBC members answered "yes".

In response to the question "***Based on the RBC meetings held to date, do you have any suggestions for the Facilitator or Planning Team to consider that might improve the meetings or planning process?***", the responding RBC members noted that "the meeting facilitation has been effective. It helps to get the information to be presented ahead of time" and "I think they are going great". One member noted that "I would suggest a summary of phase 1 and making sure all participants understand the information and models presented before entering phase 2." Another member suggested "more small group work to delve deeper into the conversation."

In response to the question "***Do you feel that you and other RBC members have been provided an equal opportunity to be heard and express your interests, ideas, and concerns?***", all 12 responding RBC members answered "yes".

In response to the question "***Are there any additional field trips that you think would give the RBC a better understanding of how water is used and managed in the basin?***", responses from the RBC members included, "Kayaking or boating on water. Trip to small streams in mountains to see the source waters", and "…an industrial application that has dramatically reduced their water usage", and "I think it would be beneficial to understand the volume of use regarding campgrounds and recreational facilities are being used on the savannah basin". Most other responding RBC members indicated that no additional field trips were needed.

3.0 Issues Impacting Schedule and Funding

No significant issues have been identified that are expected to impact the schedule or funding of the planning process through completion of Phase 4. The dissolution of the SCDHEC and start-up of the new Department of Environmental Services in mid-2024 are not currently anticipated to cause any delay in the Upper Savannah River basin planning process.

4.0 Challenges

No significant challenges to progress and meeting the objectives of the RBC process have been identified.