



**2017**

**REGIONAL WATER PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL CRITERIA  
APPENDIX 8**

# THE REGIONAL WATER PLAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING CRITERIA

Planning for adequate water supply and distribution, wastewater treatment and stormwater management is important in preparing the county for future growth and emergency preparedness. Water provides public health protection, fire protection, support for the economy and quality of life. Good water stewardship is essential to the overall fabric of Cobb County

The *“Minimum Standards and Procedures for Local Comprehensive Planning”* encourages each local governments in the State of Georgia to review the Regional Water Plan covering its area and the *“Georgia State Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria”* (O.C.G.A 12-2-8) to determine if there is a need to adapt local implementation practices or development regulations.

## THE METROPOLITAN NORTH GEORGIA WATER PLANNING DISTRICT

Cobb County is within The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (Metro Water District). The district establishes strategies for water supply and conservation, watershed and wastewater management through an integrated, holistic approach that includes three comprehensive water plans.

### Water Supply and Water Conservation Management Plan

The *“Water Supply and Conservation Management Plan”* provides the framework for meeting long term supply demand. It is a holistic plan that looks at regional issues. However, it provides local water planning recommendations to ensure an adequate water supply for future populations.

### Watershed Management Plan

The *“Watershed Management Plan”* details strategies and recommendations for both effective watershed and stormwater management and water quality protection. The plan provides local and optional watershed management measures which are to be performed at the local level.

### Wastewater Management Plan

The *“Wastewater Management Plan”* defines long-term strategies for comprehensive wastewater management across the region and provides local wastewater planning considerations.

During the Cobb 2040 planning process appropriate staff reviewed the Metro Water District plans and have taken them into consideration in formulating Cobb’s 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

## RULES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING CRITERIA

The *“Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria”* include basic rules and regulations that are intended to improve the natural environment for the people in the state. This section analyzes the five criteria that are listed in the rules.

### Water Supply Watersheds

Water supply watersheds are defined by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as areas of land upstream from a government-owned public drinking water intake. There are two water supply watersheds within Cobb County; the Chattahoochee River and Lake Allatoona.

Watershed protection is necessary to help ensure water quality for residents of a community.

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has established requirements for environmental planning in sensitive areas. These requirements include vegetated buffers and limitations on impervious surfaces and septic systems within certain watersheds. Another protective measure required by the DNR "*Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria*" that applies to certain watersheds within Cobb County relates to hazardous materials. New facilities which handle hazardous materials as determined by the Department of Natural Resources, shall perform their operations on impermeable surfaces having spill and leak collection systems as prescribed by the Department of Natural Resources.

Other protective measures are mandated through the Metropolitan River Protection Act which establishes a 2,000 foot river protection corridor along the Chattahoochee River.

### Groundwater Recharge Areas

A groundwater recharge area is any portion of the earth's surface where water infiltrates the ground to replenish an aquifers. Cobb County is underlain by a complex of metamorphic and igneous rock ranging in thickness from less than 10 feet to possibly more than 10,000 feet. Recharge is the process by which ground water infiltrates to the

underground openings by seeping through the ground or by flowing directly into openings in exposed rock. The areas with the greatest vulnerability to groundwater pollution from human activity are those with thick soils and relatively low slopes that may contain significant recharge areas.

In Cobb County, the largest probable groundwater recharge area encompasses Marietta and stretches north and south of the city. Two smaller areas of significant recharge are found in West Cobb, south of Acworth and Kennesaw.

Georgia law requires that local jurisdictions adopt and implement recharge protection measures that meet state minimum standards. In areas of significant groundwater recharge, land disposal of hazardous waste is prohibited, as are new sanitary landfills that do not have synthetic liners and leachate collection systems. All new facilities that treat, store or dispose of hazardous waste, or that handle hazardous materials of a type and amount to be defined by local ordinance must perform their operations on an impermeable pad that has a spill and leak collection system. The standards also include restrictions on lot size for use of septic tank/drain field systems. To ensure protection of groundwater recharge areas, the Cobb County Zoning Ordinance specifies that any activity relating to or associated with hazardous waste obtain approval from the applicable agency of the State of Georgia (state retains authority to regulate). This also applies to any landfilling operation. The Water Quality Section of the Stormwater Management Division of the Cobb County Water System monitors surface runoff from commercial and industrial sites. Any hazardous waste cleanup sites are handled by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources; Cobb County is responsible for first response, notification to DNR and spill containment only. Cobb County also requires a minimum 20,000 square foot lot size, dependent on suitable soil type and approval from

the county's Office of Environmental Health, prior to allowing the installation of a septic systems.

### Wetlands

According to the Georgia DNR "*Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria*", wetlands are those areas saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil condition. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs and similar areas. Wetlands are valuable for a number of reasons. They protect and improve water quality by trapping and filtering pollutants and sediment. They also recharge groundwater supplies and help to stabilize flood hazards by acting as natural flood control areas. Finally, wetlands are an essential breeding, nesting and feeding habitat for many species.

Wetlands are normally found in flood plains, along stream banks and surrounding ponds and lakes. The U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (USDA) has completed a series of detailed wetlands maps for Cobb County. A generalized wetland map can be found in the Community Profile – Appendix 1, Figure 80.

According to the USDA maps, Cobb has many wetlands of 5 to 15 acres in size and several that are 20 to 40 acres. For example, concentrations of wetlands are found along the Chattahoochee River, along Ward Creek in west Cobb, Sweetwater Creek in southwest Cobb and along Nickajack Creek in south Cobb.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's goal, as applied to the Section 404 permitting process required before disturbing wetlands, is to allow no long term degradation and no net loss of wetlands. Cobb County complies with the federal wetlands program under Section 404

of the Clean Water Act in order to maintain and protect these natural resources. The Cobb County Community Development Agency routinely visits each potential development site that is submitted for review. When Staff conducts a site visit and if it is determined that wetlands may exist on a site, the developer is responsible for requesting a determination of jurisdiction for any project that would result in altering over one acre of wetlands as required by the Clean Water Act. Therefore, residential developments located within the residential categories as recommended on the Future Land Use Map, shall exclude any acreage within flood plains and/or wetlands when calculating the overall density of the development. Cobb County does not allow land disturbing activity within delineated wetlands jurisdictions except as restricted by permit issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

- ❖ Acceptable uses of wetlands may include the following:
  - ◆ Timber production and harvesting
  - ◆ Wildlife and fisheries management
  - ◆ Wastewater treatment
  - ◆ Recreation
  - ◆ Natural Water quality treatment or purification
  - ◆ Other uses permitted under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act
  
- ❖ Unacceptable uses of wetlands may include the following:
  - ◆ Receiving areas for toxic or hazardous water or other contaminants
  - ◆ Hazardous or sanitary waste landfills
  - ◆ Other uses unapproved by local governments

In some of Cobb County's least intensive developed areas, there may be the opportunity to go over and above these minimum standards of protection by using wetlands for passive recreation and green spaces. This would counteract stressful effects of new growth and development.

### Protected Rivers & Mountains

The Chattahoochee River and Kennesaw Mountain are the two major protection areas in Cobb County. The Federal government is responsible for the protection of Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park and the Chattahoochee National Recreation Area which follows a significant portion of the Chattahoochee River in Cobb County. These are national park lands, protected from development and other intrusions within their boundaries. It is important to note that Kennesaw Mountain does not meet the minimum requirements established by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to qualify as a protected mountain.

### State Legislation

Metropolitan River Protection Act (MRPA) was adopted by the Georgia General Assembly in 1973 as a response to the overload that urbanization has put on nature's ability to control stormwater runoff and pollutants entering the Chattahoochee River. Land disturbance and construction causes more water to flow over the land, eroding soil and filling streams with sediment. The concentration of pollutants and the water temperature in stormwater runoff increases, destroying aquatic habitats. Originally, protection of the corridor surrounding the Chattahoochee and its impoundments stretched from Buford Dam to Peachtree Creek. In the 1998 session of the Georgia General Assembly, MRPA was amended to extend protection of the Chattahoochee River from the Atlanta water intake to the southern limits of Fulton and Douglas counties.

MRPA required the creation of the Chattahoochee River Corridor, which extends 2,000 feet on either side of the river and its impoundments. Additionally, the act required the creation of The Chattahoochee Corridor Plan, which subjected all development within the corridor subject to the requirements of that plan. The Chattahoochee Corridor

Plan was adopted by ARC and established three sets of standards for protection of the river corridor. The standards include: limitations on land disturbance and impervious surfaces; a 50-foot undisturbed buffer and 150-foot impervious surface setback along the river as well as a 35-foot undisturbed buffer along certain tributary streams; and specific restrictions in the 100-year and 500-year floodplains of the river.

The review process established through The Chattahoochee Corridor Plan requires that all land-disturbing activity and development within 2,000 feet of the banks of the Chattahoochee within Cobb County must be reviewed by ARC and Cobb County Community Development Department. Additionally, the development must also be approved by the Board of Commissioners and show consistency with the standards of the Corridor Plan.

### Local Protection

Cobb County has taken an extra step toward river protection by adopting the Chattahoochee River Tributary Buffer Ordinance in accordance with MRPA. This ordinance aims to protect stream tributaries in the Chattahoochee River watershed that are outside the 2,000-ft. corridor. The ordinance affects all perennial streams including Willeo, Rottenwood and Sope creeks. In the ordinance, the "Protection Area" is defined as the stream channel and the land area extending outward 25 feet horizontally from the top of the banks on each side of all flowing tributaries. This tributary buffer ordinance has been augmented by the requirements of the Cobb County Stream Buffer Ordinance, which covers all streams in the county and has requirements for buffer depth that vary with basin size.

During the Cobb 2040 planning process, appropriate staff and reviewed the *"Rules for Environmental Planning Criteria"* and have

taken them into consideration in formulating Cobb's 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

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