



Saluda River Basin Council Phase 1 Progress Report

November 2023

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 Saluda River Basin planning process spanning March 22, 2023 through October 18, 2023.

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

Eight RBC meetings were held during the Phase 1 planning period. RBC meetings in July, September, and October 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 Saluda River Basin SWAM model results for the Current Use, Unimpaired Flow, and Permitted and Registered Scenarios during RBC meetings 7 (September 2023) and 8 (October 23).

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 Saluda River basin
- Federal Energy Regulatory Commission licensing and hydropower operations
- Agribusiness in the Saluda River basin
- Land use, population growth, and socioeconomic characteristics of the basin
- Lake Management (Lake Murray, Lake Greenwood, Table Rock, and North Saluda Reservoir)
- Current water use and water demand projection methodology
- Saluda River basin climatology
- South Carolina Drought Response Act
- Freshwater aquatic resources
- The Saluda basin surface water quantity model
- Flow-ecology relationships
- “Hydrology 101”
- Current Use, Unimpaired Flow, and Permitted and Registered Scenarios surface water quantity model results

CDM Smith also provided hands-on training to interested RBC members on use of the SWAM model in early October. Nine RBC members, 1 SCDNR representative, and 2 SCDHEC staff participated in the training.

Development of Water Demand Projections

The RBC formed a subcommittee to provide guidance and input to SCDNR (and ultimately Clemson) staff developing water demand projections. The subcommittee’s work focused on public water supply demands from surface water. Items discussed as part of several subcommittee meetings included wholesale water sales and purchases, interconnected systems, per capita demand estimates, and population growth estimates. The development of water demand projections for the Moderate and High Demand Scenarios is expected to be finished in late November or early December 2023.

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 can effectively consider, digest, and understand technical information through presentations, discussion, group learning, and self-study.
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 primarily 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 and sustainably managed Saluda River Basin that balances human and ecological needs.

The goals were approved by motion.

1. *To perform a review and update of the plan every 5 years at a minimum or sooner should a significant event occur requiring plan update.*
2. *Develop and implement an education and communication plan to promote the strategies, policies, and recommendations developed for the Saluda River Basin.*
3. *Apply science-based resource management and conservation strategies that consider resource availability and allocation.*

Selection of the RBC Chair and Vice Chair

The RBC selected K.C. Price of Laurens County Water and Sewer Commission (LCWSC) (representing the Water and Sewer Utilities interest category) and Katherine Amidon of Bolton & Menk Inc. (representing the At-large interest category) as the Chair and Vice Chair, respectively.

Field Trips

The RBC completed three field trips during Phase 1. The first field trip was on August 16. After a morning meeting, the RBC toured the LCWSC Lake Greenwood Water Treatment Facility (WTF). The second field trip was on September 20. Following a morning meeting hosted by Dominion Energy, the RBC toured the Lake Murray Dam and Saluda Hydro Facility. The third field trip on October 18 followed an RBC meeting hosted by Greenville Water and included tours of Greenville's Unity Park along the Reedy River and ReWa's laboratory and Mauldin Road Water Resources Reclamation Facility (WRRF). Photos from the field trips are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The RBC took fields trips to tour (clockwise from top left) Greenville's Unity Park, the Lake Murray Dam and Hydro Facility, ReWa's Mauldin Road WRRF, and LCWSC's Lake Greenwood WTF.

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 gauge 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 15 responding RBC members answered “yes”. One member suggested there should be more emphasis on Section 4 in the planning framework (Methodologies for Evaluation Water Availability). Another member felt it would be useful to hear more about specifics of the SC Water Withdrawal Law, to whom it applies, who is grandfathered, and the Safe Yield Working Group process and report. The same member requested to hear more on agricultural programs related to water resource management, particularly from United States Department of Agriculture and Clemson Extension. Another member suggested that getting a visual perception of water volume is critical in the general view of water availability.

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 15 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 *“There is a vast range of knowledge in the room. Therefore, you must start with the basics and bring everyone along together”*; and *“We need a list of data gaps with quick explanations for why they exist and if there are solutions to improve upon those gaps.”* Several members noted difficulties in hearing speakers at The Ridge/Laurens meeting space. Two members suggested that there should be more interactive portions of the meetings and more time for creative dialogue should be planned.

In response to the request ***“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?”***, one member noted that it would be *“beneficial for facilitators to be more engaged and open to policy recommendations in this planning effort. ...there are significant omissions and misguided policies that currently govern water withdrawal in the state that is not sustainable nor scientifically based... these questions need to be more intentionally addressed. I hope that we are engaged and supported by facilitators in coming phases to make recommendations for our basin and for the state as a whole.”* (Note that RBC discussion about policy, legislative and regulatory issues, and the development of recommendations is scheduled to occur in Phases 3 and 4). One member suggested that *“...the emphasis on quantity vs quality could be stressed more.”* One member commented that *“One item that we have barely touched is interbasin discussion. The Saluda has both gains and losses. As Greenville County grows, how much more water will be transferred to the Broad River basin?”* Another member indicated

that “I think that there is an opportunity to consider land use changes as part of this planning effort or at least at a minimum present land cover conversion trends by sub basin.” Finally, one member noted that “It might be a good idea to have examples of what other basin planning groups have accomplished.”

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. Assuming that demand projections for the Moderate and High Demand Scenarios are completed no later than early December, for incorporation into the SWAM model, no delay in the overall project schedule is expected.

4.0 Challenges

No significant challenges to progress and meeting the objectives of the RBC process have been identified. The RBC has developed and maintained a list of “parking lot” items, most of which can be addressed prior to completion of the Draft Saluda River Basin Plan. The parking lot items, as they currently stand, are listed below.

1. Update and revise water use projections with utilities.
2. Engagement of the public with this process – what, when, how, who.
3. Engagement of public officials (pertinent municipalities) to promote the plan when we get to the public comment period and beyond.
4. Identify and engage stakeholders that are not involved in the basin council, but have an overlapping or adjacent connection to our efforts. For example: NRCS, SC Forestry, SCEMD, etc. *(Note that SCDNR e-mails state and federal agencies ahead of each council meeting).*
5. Development and maintenance of a public facing data clearinghouse for all things water within the Saluda Basin.
6. Hydrological impairment on the Saluda, acknowledgement of this within the final report and within our recommendations.
7. Funding for implementation.
8. Report on which watersheds have watershed-based plans and the status of those plans *(this will be documented in Chapter 1 of the Plan).*
9. We have discussed some data gaps – making sure we acknowledge those in our final report and determine how to mitigate those in the future.
10. If we want to request additional surface water demand scenarios we need to decide when?
11. Determine how and when we will coordinate with other RBCs.