

GOVERNOR PERDUE

Thank you all very much for being here, and it is historical in a sense that we've never done this before. But we probably needed to a long time ago, and that's how important your work is. So I'm glad to be here with you today for a kickoff and a charge. Glad to be here with members of our general assembly, and I want to thank you for the work that you will do, that you're about to do, and the state needs done.

It kind of reminds me - our situation in our state reminds me - of a couple driving down a country road, back road, just trying to look out on the scenery on a Sunday afternoon. And they came to a little muddy part of the road. And Senator Hooks, we know all about those dirt roads don't we, Senator? Came to a little muddy spot in the road and they said, well, I think we can make it through. But the hole was deeper than they imagined and they got stuck again, and pretty soon they heard the putt-putt-putt of that little John Deere tractor coming down the road and the farmer was there. The tractor was kind of muddy and he said, how are y'all doing? They said, we've tried but we can't get out of this mud hole. Can you help us? He said, well I think I can, about \$50 worth. So he had a chain on the tractor, so he hooked up to the car and pulled them out and they were happy to have that help and thanked him for it. And the man said, well, this hole is deeper than it seems; anybody else get stuck? He said, oh yeah, this is about the fifth car I've pulled out today. They looked around and said, your farm? He said, yeah this is my farm. He said, well how in the world do you have time to work your fields and plow the land, do you do it at night? He said, no, night is when I fill up this water hole.

So he had sort of a different water management plan than we're talking about but it deals with a very important resource that is more serious than humorous. It requires us to be good stewards, and that's why we're here today, to talk about a plan that we believe will serve everyone's best interest. Frankly, we're here because we share the understanding and the need for a common purpose in Georgia's water.

I want to congratulate all of those who worked on bringing this issue. Many have worked on it for years, but we share a common concern about Georgia's water supply, its usage, its re-usage and its sustainability, and about its long-term quality - not only access and quantity, but quality as well. You know that we've seen over the last three years how we've come frankly too close to the verge of depleting our drinking water supplies in a little town as large as Savannah or Atlanta and in other communities around the state. And it's going to take good planning, good execution to make sure that doesn't happen again. And it's imperative that we begin to act and begin to plan for those situations and address the shortcomings that we've had and mitigate future risk as we go forward. So that's the task.

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Last year our general assembly, after having studied this issue, I think took a very courageous step for a state in helping Georgia to become a better steward of the resources when they passed the state's first comprehensive statewide water management plan. You know that was not without controversy, when you get communities all over the state talking about rules and regulations and policies and procedures of how we share and utilize a most vital resource that every citizen in every community all across Georgia must have on a regular basis, and that is serious. And it wasn't without controversy, but to the credit of the legislature, they stayed by the stuff and everyone had their say and reason prevailed in the end and I think we've got a good product.

But frankly, ladies and gentlemen, that product is only going to be as good as you all make it, and that's where you come into play. This plan puts a lot of responsibility on your shoulders for creating and evolving a workable solution for the future. I want to tell you that it's also a plan that has probably been as inclusive as any major political policy piece that I've ever been involved in, in my political life. And I was very proud of the way that we all, mostly the legislature and mostly communities, conducted themselves in having their say and I thought it was really a great act of democracy and coming together with this. So with that said, y'all have got a big job to do and a lot of expectations are on your shoulders. It's a big job because our state varies by region and it varies in economic growth. It varies because growth and development have different effects over different parts of our state. And frankly we came to a conclusion that a regional approach to water resource management was the very best way that we could address this issue. It makes sense because we know that the solutions for the metro area of Atlanta will be very different from those of south Georgia's wetlands or the streams of north Georgia that we want to protect, and it must be handled in a different way.

I guess the political cliché is one size doesn't fit all, and when it comes to watersheds, that absolutely is true. And that's why we've divided ourselves into regional water councils that share a common topography, something that literally is immutable. Congressional boundaries can change at the vote of the legislature, but our watersheds and our topography is immutable and unchanging in the fact that we will share these waters among our regions as long as this earth is here.

So the work of the implementation is left up to you, the regional councils. You'll work with those in your region along with a lot of interested members of your community, stakeholders. You'll coordinate with your neighboring regions, and you'll work with those neighbors upstream and downstream because water is a resource that we share. And just like I used to tell my children about how we share one another's reputation, we don't necessarily choose that but we share one another's reputation, we share these resources from our recipient of our

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upstream neighbors to the downstream recipients from us and it does affect – all of that connectivity affects how our communities resolve issues. We're also, as we well know, compelled because it's the right thing to do but compelled because of the connectivity of working with our neighboring states because we share water resources with them.

Now you understand and are aware that we've worked very hard on our neighbors to the west and we continue to work in that regard, but unfortunately it's evolved into more litigation than negotiation and common sense solutions that I would prefer. But we have begun a collaborative effort, very healthy, with South Carolina and Governor Sanford in which we've appointed teams to look at the sharing of the Savannah river district and how we as different states can use that resource for availability, for discharge, and to make sure the health of both sides in those sides of those states thrive in its relationship with the river. So we're working to find workable, mutually beneficial water management solutions that would benefit both states. Some members of that bi-state committee are here with us today and also council members in that area are here as well.

You're going to be on this council with some folks who probably see things the same way that you do. They think like you do, they understand your issues. And you're also going to be on here with some folks that may see things from a different perspective. All of you who are married, you probably have a head start on those kind of issues, you understand that. But we have representatives here with backgrounds ranging from education to businesses to hydrologic engineering to other professional states in the water management business.

And frankly, I want you all to know this "you" and this volunteer job that you've signed up for probably has had as much interest as any other position that we've had any appointing powers to in the state. There were overwhelming numbers of people who were nominated, self-nominated, nominated by communities, different sectors and different groups, so you need to understand that your position was a sought-after position. And the way the legislature set up the appointing with a balance of governor, lieutenant governor, House and Speaker and having input into this --we've got a lot at stake in your success, and it's your job to get everyone involved in your watershed and your water district to build a consensus around the best plans going forward in water management; solutions that will serve the interest of Georgians in your watershed, in Georgians across our state, not only now but well into the future as well.

So we worked hard to get here where we are today and in this convening of the initial meeting, I want you to know that we're counting on you to get the job done because we believe that you are a talented group of people, well meaning, well intended from different perspectives that makes truly the essence of democracy work, and that's what we're hoping. But frankly, everything will be for naught if

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we get the loggerheads, if we're not able to work through these solutions of consensus and moving forward and that means giving and taking, that means seeing things from other people's perspective and understanding that our view is not the only view out there. I guess I speak on behalf of the legislators, that's probably the first thing you come to recognize when you come and join the legislature is that not everybody thinks like you do. I had to get over that for a while. I used to tell Mary Margaret Oliver who represented the 43rd district in the state senate, it's a good thing I couldn't get elected in your district and you couldn't get elected in mine because we see things differently in that regard based on our makeup and our constituency and those that we represent.

So I've got a charge for you today. It's serious business and I want to make sure you understand that. I want to charge you all today, every member of these regional water councils to show up, to study up and to be cooperative, and you've got to find out what works and what doesn't work and how you're going to get to the solutions that will work, what can we do to implement the solutions that will further secure our future regarding water resources. These are the questions that you're charged to answer and bring forth in a creative fashion, and not every watershed's answers will be the same. You can collaborate, but you're going to find that you all have your individual test to resolve.

So we've all seen it over the course of this three-year drought, if you don't have access to clean water, quality water, a whole lot of other things that we thought were important for our community, our industry, our businesses doesn't really matter. That's how important it is. Nothing is more important for our long-term economic prospects than protecting the sustainability of our quality water resources.

If we're going to find a way to balance that water use and growth, it will frankly be through your dedication, your ingenuity over the next three years as we look at these solutions. The regional water plan that you create through our state literally will set the course of water management policy for years to come. That's how important it is. This role, what you're assuming, the responsibility goes far beyond simply attending meetings and developing formal water management plans. I want you to take it upon yourselves to be ambassadors for conservation in your region. You will have a standing, you will have stature, your opinion will matter locally as people come to understand the charge and the responsibility you've been given. Be conservation ambassadors where you work, where you worship, in your neighborhood, and you need to raise awareness in your communities about the importance of water and the risk that we face if we continue to treat water as an infinite resource which we all know it's not.

The good news is, and we've found especially in this drought, sometimes we're tested to find the things of how resilient we can be. But Georgians will respond if

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they understand what's going on. We've got some great stories out in our state about that response to our drought efforts. The responses of our communities and our businesses to cut back on water uses has absolutely been beyond expectation and exemplary. We've seen a broad response from companies investing millions of dollars into new re-use technology within their plants, refitting industrial facilities with cutting-edge progressive technologies that cut their water usage, to simply concerned parents within a family discussion talking about brushing your teeth and taking showers and how we as a family can do our part in that.

We're literally talking about a state cultural change, literally a culture of conservation of which you all can be the premier ambassadors, and I hope that you will take that charge. This drought and the pictures of the long dry banks at Lake Lanier that have been broadcast across the nation mean that your message of conservation will be received well. I think everybody understands and is much more aware than we were simply three years ago, and more than ever before people will understand the needs to use water wisely and not to believe that it will just ever flow as it has in the past. You know, the old saying I think holds true and it's true in water is that people don't change when they see the light, they change when they feel the heat, or they don't believe the water will flow again. So hopefully that will be the case here.

Today as you leave here, leave with a culture of conservation that has taken root in your belief structure and in your willingness to advocate for that. The seeds have been planted and your challenge frankly is to cultivate that spirit of conservation in our state.

You've been given a tall order, I understand that, it is a tough job. Between 2001 and 2008 our state welcomed more than one and a half million people to Georgia, and I'm fully confident that with this economic bump in the road that we're in the midst of now, people still want to come to our state. They're coming even today but they will come back at the paces in which we've seen the growth in the past and we must be ready. I'm not talking about people just coming for the ACC championship or to visit Sea Island or come to the Peach Bowl. I'm talking about one and a half million people come to raise their families, to create their jobs and their futures and to stay here with us for all the benefits Georgia offers. So we're regularly one of the fastest growing states in the country, and while that has been an economic advantage for us and one that we've taken advantage of, it places incredible strain on those vital resources that you will have the responsibility to help conserve.

The average person we know uses about 100 gallons of water everyday. That doesn't stop on weekends. Seven days a week, 365 days a year. And so you picture a big long yellow school bus with over 30 double seats. One and a half

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million people would fill about 23,000 of those buses and that's the people we just welcomed in the last few years and they're still coming, and they will come in even faster paces. So what we're asking you to do is identify workable, sustainable practices that will protect our most precious natural resource. It's about providing a quality of life that is reliable and sustainable in our state for years to come. Getting water right is about what will happen in the quality of life that our grandchildren will enjoy and what it's like for them. But I know it's a tall order, I know I've challenged you, but I know that you're up to it. I want to thank you for your willingness to take this on and God bless you in your efforts.

Thank you.