

# Investing in Georgia's Energy, Land, and Water Resources

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## Georgia WaterFirst Program

2020 CIFA SRF Workshop



Ansley Jones

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# GEFA Introduction

- **GEFA is a state authority founded in 1985.**
- **GEFA's mission is to conserve and protect Georgia's energy, land, and water resources.**
  - GEFA has provided more than \$4.3 billion in low-interest loans
  - GEFA has funded approximately 1,600 projects

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# What is the WaterFirst Program?



- A voluntary certification program for local governments
- Requires a comprehensive approach to water planning and management, measured by achievement of checklist items under 9 overarching categories

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# WaterFirst Principles

## WaterFirst communities...

- Work with local and state partners to increase the quality of life through the wise management and protection of water resources
- Take a proactive approach to water resources planning by connecting land use and water quality and quantity
- Pursue environmental excellence beyond what is required by law
- Protect valuable water resources for both environmental and economic benefits today and for future generations

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# Designation Benefits

## Financial Incentives

- 1% interest rate reduction for SRF loans.
- Annual eligibility for Community Block Development Grants for water-related projects.
- Priority for EPD 319 Grant funding (bonus points on application).

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# WaterFirst Savings on SRF Loans

**2 examples...**

Community, Loan Amount, Amortization Period	Total Interest at Standard Interest Rate	Total Interest at WaterFirst Interest Rate	Total Savings over Amortization Period
Griffin: \$8 million, 20 years	\$1.94 million	\$1.04 million	\$900,000
Newton County WSA: \$25 million, 30 years	\$12.60 million	\$7.95 million	\$4.65 million

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# Designation Benefits cont'd



## Other Benefits

- State-wide recognition, including road signage, and authorization to use the WaterFirst logo.
- Free attendance to WaterFirst workshops and other networking opportunities.

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# WaterFirst History

## **Founded in 2002**

- Partnership between Georgia Department of Community Affairs and Keep Georgia Beautiful
- Involvement of other entities: Association of County Commissioners of Georgia, Georgia Municipal Association, Georgia Environmental Protection Division, UGA Carl Vinson Institute, GEFA
- Administration of the program moved to GEFA in 2018

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# WaterFirst History

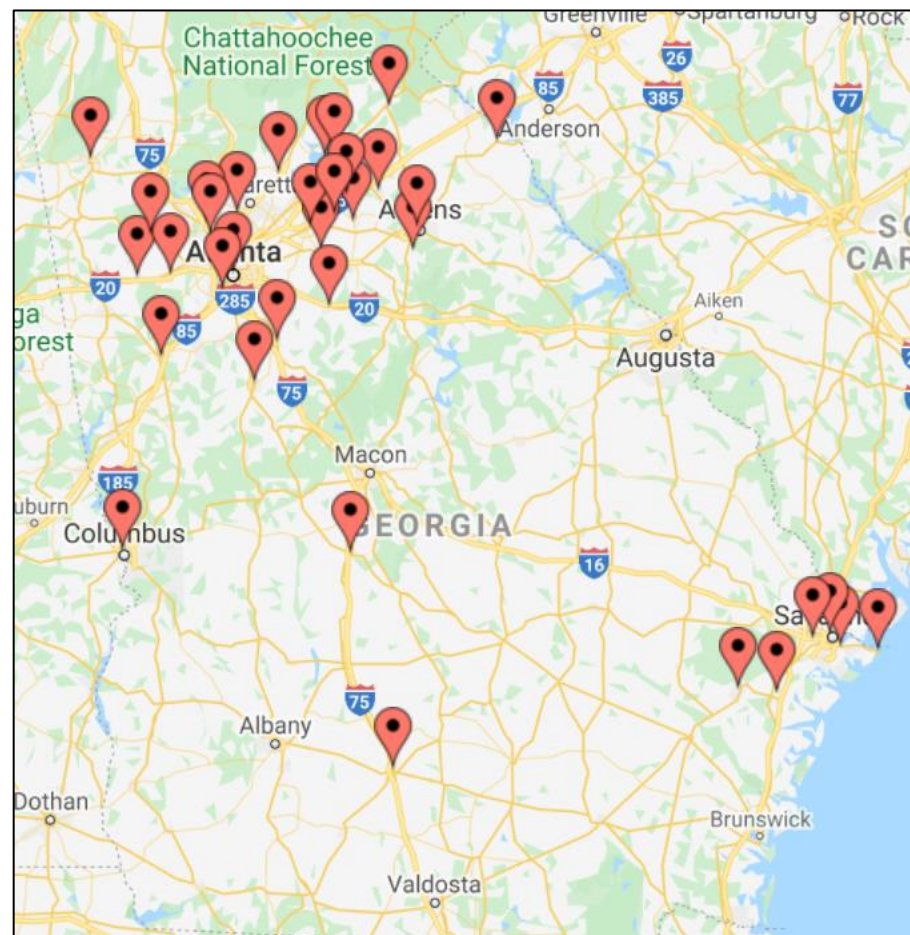
## Community Participation

- First designees: City of Savannah, Gwinnett County
- Partnerships required when an authority is the applicant
- It is also possible to apply as a multi-jurisdictional partnership (e.g. multiple municipalities within a county)
- 39 designees to date (multijurisdictional partnerships count as 1 designee)
- GEFA's administration of the program has revamped interest, with 7 designations in the last 2 years

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# WaterFirst Designees



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# WaterFirst Process

Paper Application Submission	Onsite Review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Application + Water Management Audit (WaterFirst checklist) available on GEFA website</li><li>• Applications accepted on a rolling basis</li><li>• Application committee determines if applicant is accepted into WaterFirst Class</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community holds a presentation, covering its work under the 9 WaterFirst categories</li><li>• Community gives a tour of somewhere of interest (to highlight WaterFirst efforts)</li><li>• Peer reviewers (a team of WaterFirst designees) provide evaluations with numeric score</li></ul>

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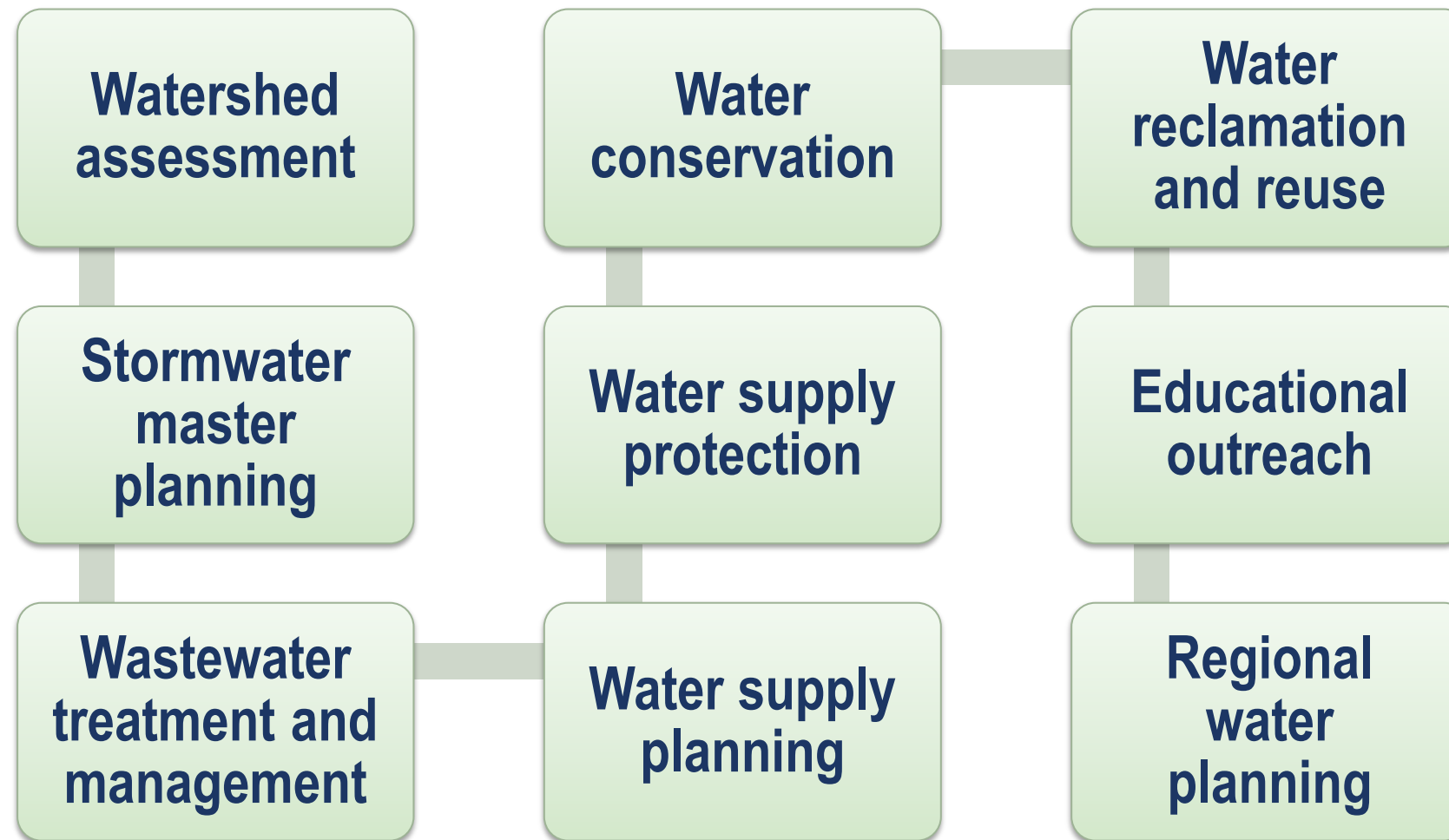
# Water Management Audit

WaterFirst Checklist				
Please indicate date completed or start date for program elements. For questions about the WaterFirst checklist, please email <a href="mailto:waterresources@gefa.ga.gov">waterresources@gefa.ga.gov</a> .				
	Date Completed	In Progress (Start Date)	Not Applicable	Write a short explanation of what has been completed
Watershed Assessment				
Evaluate existing stream conditions and threats to water quality.				
Identify watershed boundaries and organizations currently working within the watershed to improve and protect water resources.				
Implement a water quality monitoring program to include biological integrity and chemical and physical measures.				
Determine areas where protection is critical as important wildlife habitat.				
Adopt stream corridor protection and buffer requirements.				
Implement and enforce an effective sedimentation and erosion control program.				
Require incorporation of water quality improvement measures in stormwater best management practices.				
Coordinate land use planning and zoning to promote water quality protection.				
Adopt an open space preservation program.				
Adopt the Part 5 Environmental Criteria.				
Establish parking lot/road width standards to minimize impervious surfaces.				

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# Checklist Categories

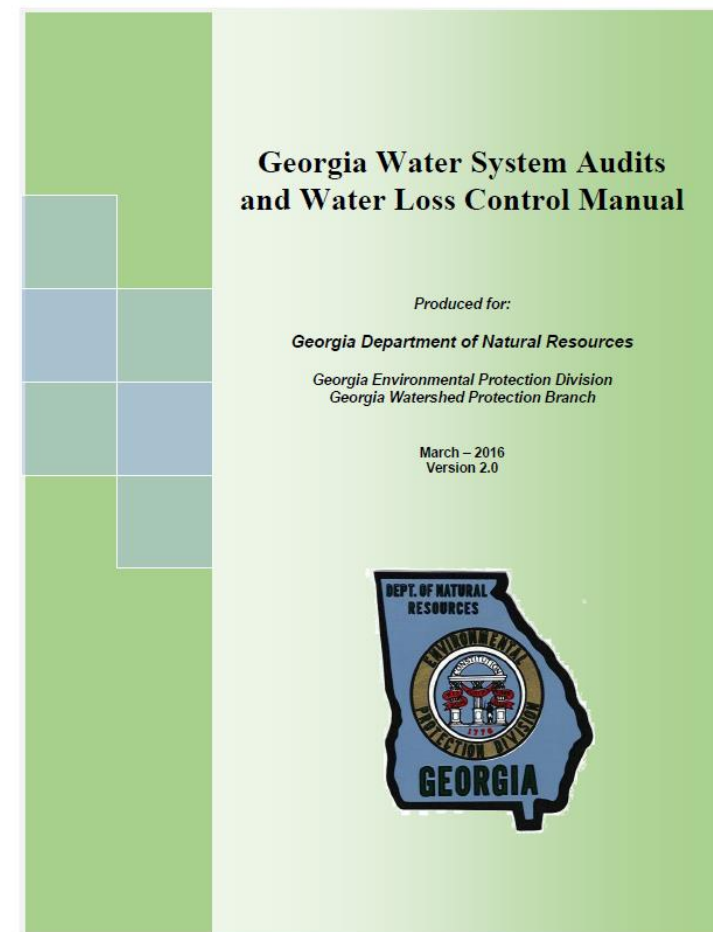
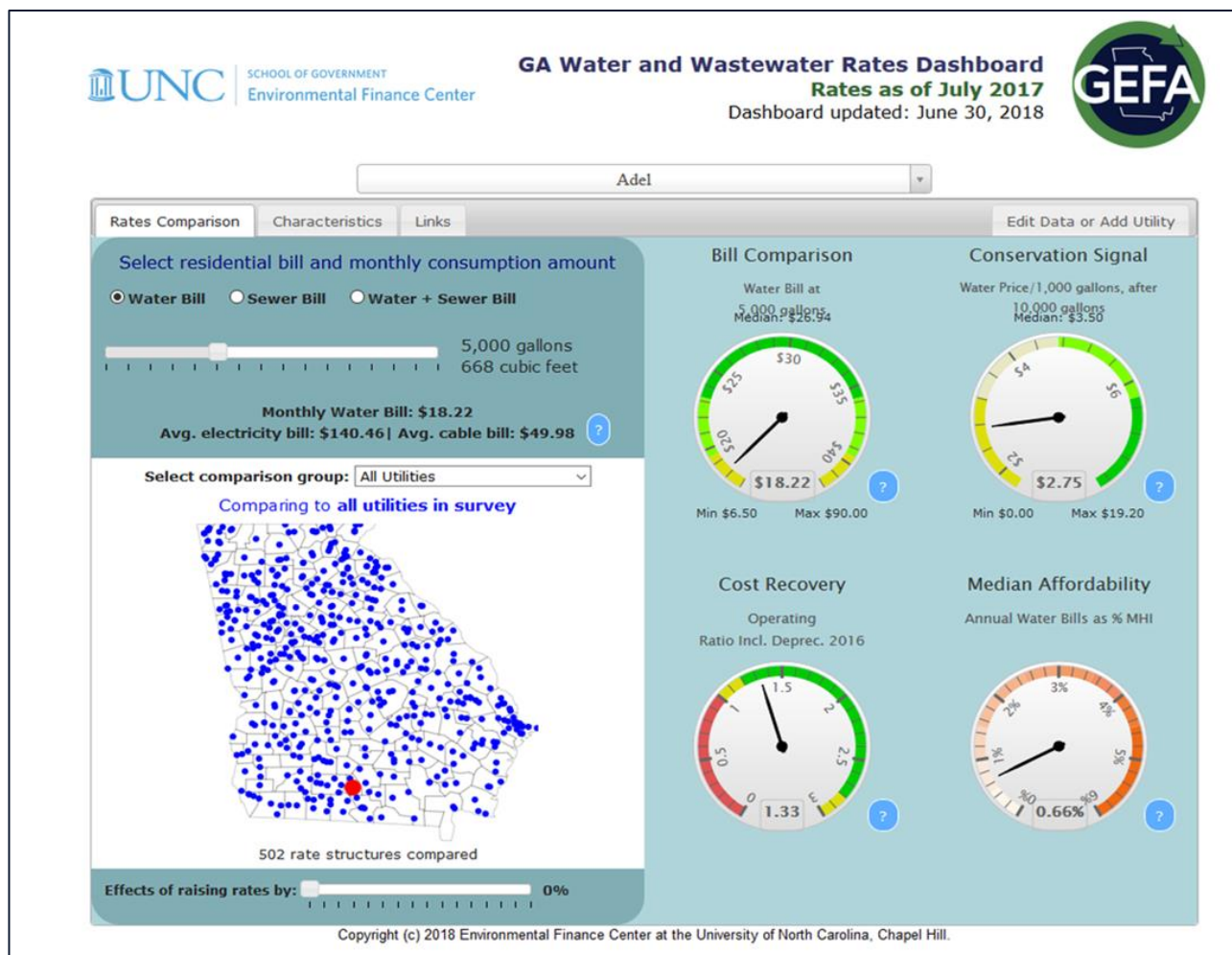


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# Technical Assistance



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# Technical Assistance cont'd

## 2020 Webinar Series

- 4 sessions with presentations by WaterFirst designees
- Topics covered:
  - Water Supply & Wastewater Master Planning
  - Stormwater Master Planning
  - Water Conservation & Education
  - Watershed Assessment



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# WaterFirst Community Responsibilities

## MOA holds communities accountable

- Minimum requirements
- Community-specific goals
- Renewal required after 5 years



## Continual Improvement

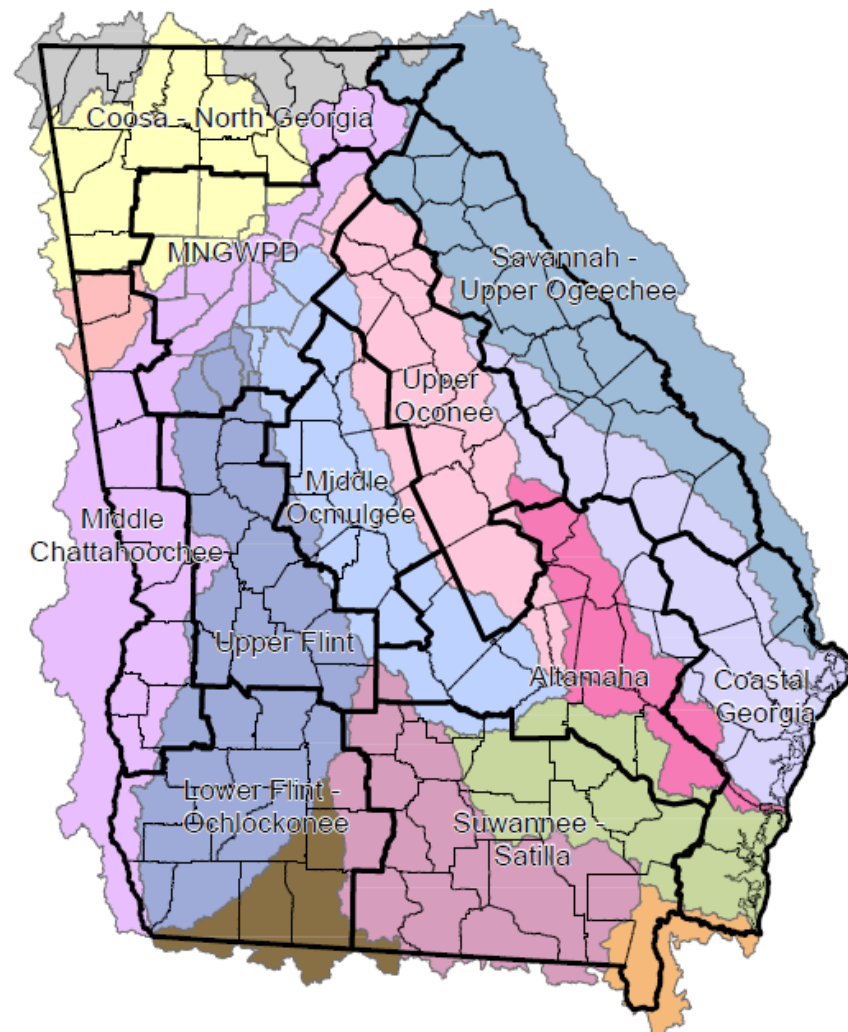
- Communities report on their residential water consumption patterns over the 5-year term
  - Typically we see that conservation practices are working!
- Communities report if the number of residents on private wells or septic tanks has changed over the 5-year term

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# State Water Plan



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# WaterFirst Summary

## WaterFirst helps with...

- State-local planning coordination
- Communities' pursuit of fiscal and environmental sustainability
- Awareness of GEFA and SRF programs
- Interest from other entities, including citizens and nonprofits

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