



# GEORGIA WATER COALITION

Strategic Plan,  
2023–2028

Prepared by Advantage Consulting, LLC

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## Overview

### The Georgia Water Coalition

The Georgia Water Coalition (GWC) was formed in 2002 to educate Georgians about the threats to our surface and groundwater resources and to mobilize a statewide movement to protect these critical resources via legislative action and administrative rulemaking. Twenty-one years later, the Coalition continues to lead by providing non-partisan, science-based information about the importance — even critical nature — of prudent statewide water management. The GWC's efforts benefit all Georgians because we ask our leaders to make responsible decisions about how best to protect our finite water resources in a changing climate, now and in the future.

Governed by a 14-member Leadership Team and made up of more than 250 member groups from across the state, we aim to craft strong, equitable water policies that benefit all Georgians. We work transparently and by consensus to build relationships with legislators and other decision makers at all levels of government. Each year we focus on two to three proactive priorities to allow capacity to deal with annual attempts to rollback or weaken existing protections. The outcome has been many legislative and administrative successes including passage of the Trust Fund Honesty Amendment, the Emergency Response bill, reinstating coastal marsh buffers, and stopping multiple attempts to privatize Georgia's water resources.

The GWC advocates for public use of and access to Georgia's water as well as for protection of private property rights. This two-pronged approach appeals to all stripes of conservationists from one end of the political spectrum to the other. The GWC fosters trust both internally and externally through broad participation, robust communications, targeted community outreach, committee collaborations, and our participation agreements. This trust and collaboration form the foundation of our success. Our work increases the capacities of all member groups and allows us to be more effective across the state and within our own watersheds.

For more information, visit [www.gawater.org](http://www.gawater.org).

### Our Mission and Guiding Principles

The Georgia Water Coalition's mission is to protect and care for Georgia's surface water and groundwater resources, which are essential for sustaining economic prosperity, providing clean and abundant drinking water, preserving diverse aquatic habitats for wildlife and recreation, strengthening property values, and protecting the quality of life for current and future generations.

The members of the Georgia Water Coalition work collaboratively and transparently with each other to achieve specific goals based on the following principles.

- A. The surface waters and groundwater of Georgia are public resources to be managed by the state in the public interest and in a sustainable manner to protect natural systems, meet human and economic needs, account for the effects of climate change, and correct historic inequities.
- B. Effective water management requires ongoing, rigorous evaluation and planning that is:
  - transparent and informed by citizen input;
  - based on watersheds, river basins, and aquifers;
  - informed by the best available scientific data;
  - reliant on uniform, consistently applied, and enforceable standards; and
  - implemented, enforced, and timely revised as necessary.
- C. In order to ensure that every Georgian has access to clean water, biases and inequities must be addressed, and all Georgians must have equal opportunity to a seat at the decision-making table. Discriminatory biases, such as racism, are embedded in our society's institutions. These biases influence public resources, such as community processes, priority setting, and resource allocation. As a result, pollution and toxins disproportionately impact the health of marginalized communities, including but not limited to Black, Indigenous, people of color, immigrant, and lower wealth communities.
- D. Shared waters must be apportioned equitably among all users to meet reasonable needs and assure the long-term sustainability of the natural systems on which those water supplies depend.
- E. Effective water management and allocation requires conservation as the primary management method. All Georgians must strive to become better water stewards for those living in a downstream area, adjacent state, or elsewhere in a given river basin.

### Why These Priorities Now?

For many years, Georgia has been blessed with an abundant supply of water. Our heritage of plentiful, clean, and flowing water has driven population and development growth and made our state an attractive location for businesses and families. But now we face a new reality. Ever increasing water consumption, as well as recurring periods of drought, has made it clear that water is a finite resource. Georgia is now at a crossroads.

Since the development of our last strategic plan in 2016, the public’s attention to climate change has increased. Although everyone bears the effects of our changing climate, we acknowledge that the impact will be felt more by some communities — especially those mentioned in our Guiding Principles: Black, Indigenous, people of color, immigrant, and lower wealth communities — than others. The environmental-justice movement offers a vital lens for looking at the coalition’s policy and programmatic priorities to ensure that Georgians are equitably involved in shaping their own communities and listened to by leaders and policy makers at state and local levels.

Georgia’s remarkable diversity requires our statewide coalition to ensure the inclusion of voices of all who care about our water resources. While developing the objectives and strategies in this plan, the GWC placed continuous emphasis on growing our reach with purposeful efforts to attract this diversity — coupled with the necessary provision of genuine opportunities for belonging in decision making. We welcome all Georgians who are committed to the coalition’s Mission and Guiding Principles. Through intentional focus on Member recruitment and support, comprehensive advocacy efforts, and enhanced internal capacity, the GWC will emerge at the future end of this strategic plan manifestly stronger and representative of the diverse ways communities rely on water.

Moreover, with wisdom gained through more than 20 years, the coalition has arrived at a natural point of transition where either it can maintain its activities, reacting to the ebbs and flows of water policy and threats, or grow into a new mature phase with clarified processes, strengthened capacity (of itself and its Members), and proactive agendas that stretch from local to statewide issues. With this plan, we choose the latter.

**Member Engagement:** This strategic plan is a framework for the coalition’s continued growth in innovative and inclusive ways toward fulfilling the policy aims of its Biennial Report, “[The Georgia Water Coalition’s Recommendations for a Healthy Water Future \(2023 Update\)](#).” The strategic plan is supplemented by internal implementation plans that outline the activities, resources, and timelines for pursuing its strategies and achieving its objectives. Together, they outline clear opportunities for Members — based on time, interest, and capacity — to engage at varying intensity, from bodies like the Leadership Team, Legislative Team, and committees and campaigns, to programs and events for education and support, networking, and planning.

**Winning Advocacy Efforts:** The GWC is a trusted, nonpartisan movement and advocate. This reputation owes to decades of building internal capacity and successes while maintaining relationships with elected officials and leaders in various sectors. This competency is crucial in the early days of this plan's implementation, coinciding with the start of the 2023 legislative session marked by significant turnover in important offices: the Lieutenant Governor and President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, the House Majority Leader, the Chair of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and the Environment, and the Agriculture Commissioner. This comes in addition to the broader post-election turnover in the legislature and Governor's office, with so many new officials to meet and orient to the coalition's priorities. With this in mind, we will dedicate ourselves to a robust, ongoing program of engagement with state and local public officials that mobilizes both grassroots organizations and the coalition's strength in grassroots activation.

**Coalition Capacity:** Finally, as the coalition continues to develop into its third decade, we have opted against changing our current legal structure. Instead, we will focus on building out our shared ability to sustain this work. We will hold ourselves accountable for robust fundraising to support growth, including more staff-like roles to support key operational areas like communications. Furthermore, we will clarify and centralize standard operating procedures to make it easier for Members to understand how the coalition works and to find opportunities to get involved. We have not closed the door on alternative legal structures, however, and this plan's activities create a foundation that would allow a reconsideration in the future.

## Our Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

To achieve its mission, the Georgia Water Coalition will pursue the following goals, objectives, and strategies.<sup>1</sup>

### Goal 1

**Members of the Georgia Water Coalition persist in their involvement because of accessible opportunities to further the coalition’s Mission and support the Guiding Principles.**

Objective 1: Increase Member retention through an intentional recruitment and support program, transparent structure and expectations, and meaningful engagement.

Strategy 1.1: Define and maintain transparent structure and expectations for membership to maximize Members’ opportunities to take part.

Strategy 1.2: Implement an intentional Member recruitment program.

Strategy 1.3: Develop and implement a standard program for onboarding and continual training.

Strategy 1.4: Expand structured and unstructured opportunities for Members to interact with each other for learning, socialization and networking, and action.

Strategy 1.5: Optimize internal communication for Member coordination and support.

#### *Select Progress Indicators*

- Growth of Membership
- Member retention
- Member engagement (participation in events by type)
- Training effectiveness
- Growth in number of activists

### Goal 2

**The Georgia Water Coalition manages winning advocacy efforts for protecting our state’s water resources.**

Objective 2: Increase the effectiveness of advocacy efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> A **goal** is the future state if our plan is fulfilled. An **objective** is the condition we are trying to change to realize a future state. A **strategy/initiative** includes the activities we will undertake to change a condition.

Strategy 2.1: Develop and maintain campaign and communications plans for every issue.

Strategy 2.2: Execute an annual calendar of intentional, strategic, and coordinated engagement of local and state government officials.

Strategy 2.3: Train and support Members around effective communication and advocacy on GWC issues, including accountability for deploying messages.

#### *Select Progress Indicators*

- Active involvement of committee members
- Achievement of campaign objectives
- Legislator engagement
- Mobilization at local and state levels
- Impressions and reach on social media

### **Goal 3**

**The Georgia Water Coalition has the financial resources, staffing capacity, and systems and processes to grow and sustain its impact.**

Objective 3: Increase the coalition's capacity with strategic fundraising, staffing, and operating procedures.

Strategy 3.1: Develop and implement a transparent, growth-oriented fundraising strategy.

Strategy 3.2: Enhance the coalition's operations through strategic staffing.

Strategy 3.3: Create and maintain transparent standard operating procedures in support of committees, campaigns, communications, and operations.

#### *Select Progress Indicators*

- Financial growth and diversity of funding sources
- Funder engagement with coalition events
- Designated funding for specific campaigns and activities
- Re-grant program for Members
- Expanded staffing for coalition operations and management
- Accessible, current standard operating procedures



## Appendix

### Overview of Planning Process

The Georgia Water Coalition engaged Advantage Consulting, LLC (Atlanta, GA) to facilitate and produce a five-year strategic plan. Their primary partner in strategic planning was the coalition's Strategic Planning Committee, an 11-person group that consisted of select Leadership Team members and active Member organizations. The committee supplied project leadership and coordination, meeting monthly during the project, including project kick-off, review of data findings, preparation for the planning retreat, and three implementation-planning sessions. In addition, this team collaborated by e-mail and through the coalition's Google Drive files to develop various products, like surveys, preliminary reports, and the final strategic plan.

The planning process was data-driven, relying on the insights of core stakeholders like Members, decision-making bodies like the Leadership Team and Legislative Team, funders, the news media, state legislators, and other external voices with key perspectives on the coalition's activities and opportunities. With much of the data being qualitative, thematic analyses were conducted to surface trends, providing clarity on what matters to make decisions and move forward.

The process consisted of these main steps:

#### **1 | Conduct Data Collection and Analysis.** *August–November 2022.*

Define data-collection priorities, targets, and timeline/milestones to inform the development of the strategic plan. Identify key stakeholders to be invited to participate in surveys, and craft outreach strategy. Develop, refine, and distribute stakeholder surveys. Read various reports and internal documents to get a full understanding of the GWC, key water issues in Georgia, and obstacles to effective water policy. Conduct research on other coalitions and gather information on their legal structure, internal structure, and overall success. Prepare reporting/presentation summary and materials. Interview key stakeholders on survey findings. Review and reflect on research findings at annual GWC Leadership Team meeting and semi-annual Membership meeting.

#### **2 | Engage in Strategic Planning Retreat.** *November 2022.*

Review findings from Data Collection and Analysis phase, including survey, interviews, and Member reflections, as well as research into coalition models. Draft and prioritize strategic goals, objectives, and initiatives, particularly around policy and programmatic aims. Discuss implications for legal structure, leadership structure, and staffing based on intended impacts.

### **3 | Develop Action Plans.** *December 2022–February 2023.*

Draft and confirm key action steps, resource requirements, responsible parties, and timelines for prioritized initiatives.

### **4 | Produce the Final Strategic Plan.** *January–February 2023.*

Develop five-year strategic plan to include goals, objectives, initiatives, and performance indicators, and present it to GWC Leadership Team for approval.

## **Strategic Planning Committee**

- Tonya Bonitatibus, Savannah Riverkeeper
- Chandra Brown, GWC Consultant/Influence Advocacy
- Jesse Demonbreun-Chapman, Coosa River Basin Initiative
- Jennette Gayer, Environment Georgia
- Andrea Jones, Georgia WAND
- Brionté McCorkle, Georgia Conservation Voters
- Codi Norred, Georgia Interfaith Power and Light
- Gina Rogers, Georgia Wildlife Federation
- Amy Sharma, Science for Georgia
- Rachael Thompson, Glynn Environmental Coalition
- Mike Worley, Georgia Wildlife Federation

## **Leadership Team**

- Altamaha Riverkeeper
- Chattahoochee Riverkeeper
- Coosa River Basin Initiative
- Environment Georgia
- Flint Riverkeeper
- Garden Club of Georgia
- Georgia River Network
- Georgia Wildlife Federation
- Ogeechee Riverkeeper
- One Hundred Miles
- Satilla Riverkeeper
- Sierra Club, Georgia Chapter
- Savannah Riverkeeper
- Southern Environmental Law Center