Kit Dunlap Testimony
(8/8/06 Environmental and Public Works Committee, Field Hearing)

Members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss some of the water issues that we're dealing with here in North Georgia. As you may know, I'm here today wearing two hats. I currently serve as President and CEO of the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce and have a strong interest in the economic issues associated with Lake Lanier and the entire ACF Basin. I'm also here today as Chairman of the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District which is a 16-county water planning agency that was created by the General Assembly five years ago to develop regional water plans.

My comments today will focus on three areas: (1) the economic impacts of Lake Lanier and the ACF Basin, (2) the critical importance of the ACF Basin and the role of regional water planning, and (3) the Impact of Water Supply on River Flows on the Apalachicola River.

The Economic impact of Lake Lanier and the ACF system

The economic impact of Lake Lanier is over $5 billion annually as shown in the 2001 study by the Marine Trade Association of Metro Atlanta. Recreation is a predominant part of this figure. Lake Lanier is the most visited Corps of Engineers lake in the Southeastern United States with a variety of tourism and recreation activities.

More broadly, the portion of the ACF basin within the metropolitan Atlanta area accounts for over two-thirds of the basin population and nearly half of the population of the State of Georgia. It generates a significant majority of the total personal income in the ACF basin and roughly one-half of the personal income of the State.

Any action that would harm the economy of metropolitan Atlanta would reduce the per capita wealth and income of the ACF basin and the State as a whole.

The Role of Regional Water Planning

With a finite water supply and a population of over four million and growing, the need to carefully and cooperatively manage and protect metropolitan Atlanta's rivers and streams has become a priority. In September of 2003, the District adopted three long-term water management plans. Of these, the Water Supply and Water Conservation Management Plan (Plan), calls for a future of intensive water demand management and an aggressive water conservation program.

When I was asked to serve as chairman of the District, many of my colleagues in Hall County questioned my decision to go down to Atlanta to talk about water. Yet it was important for all players – every county, every basin – to be at the table. There were certainly differences of opinion during the planning process, but the plans were created and all 16 counties and 95 cities in the District are moving to put the plans into action. We are in a sense "regulating ourselves" and working toward the same water protection goals.

We learned a lot from our first planning process and are pleased to see water resources planning gaining precedence at the state level as well. We applaud Georgia EPD's efforts on the new State Water Plan and the District is pleased to be participating in the state planning process.

We also certainly realize that other parts of the state have different water needs and interests. We want to continue to work with our upstream and downstream neighbors and further our outreach efforts beyond the District's borders.

With regard to the ACF basin specifically, the District has made great strides towards meeting the Plan's water conservation goals. Currently, over 85 percent of the District's population is billed with a conservation pricing structure. The District has also trained local governments in water system leak reduction and repair, conducting commercial and residential water audits. Over 9,000 household water assessment brochures have been distributed since the spring of 2006. The District's educational program consists of commercials for television and radio, a television special, billboards, public workshops, essay contests and a variety of educational material such as brochures. In 2005, over 600 commercials were aired, 42 workshops were held with an average of 30 – 40 participants and over 1,000 middle school students participated in a water conservation and quality essay contest.

Aggressive water conservation is critical to the region's future. The District will continue to work with and support implementation of the Plan's water conservation measures. The District is working with local governments to implement new programs such as retrofit programs for old, inefficient fixtures and pre-rinse spray valves.

The Impact of Water Supply on the Apalachicola River

The total net diversion from the ACF Basin for water supply for the Atlanta metropolitan area ranges between 250 and 300 cubic feet per second (cfs). This is the average daily net diversion from the ACF Basin for all counties within the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District. Most of this water is taken from Lake Lanier. A small amount comes from the Flint River.

To put this figure in comparison, agricultural withdrawals in South Georgia have a much larger impact on the surface water resources in the Flint River Basin. According to testimony recently offered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, this impact is estimated to be between 600 and 700 cfs during the summer months.

Because there are no large reservoirs in the Flint River, withdrawals from this part of the basin have a "real time" impact on stream flow. Agricultural demands are highest during the summer, when stream flows are lowest. Therefore such demands have a disproportionate impact on stream flow.

Evaporation also has a significant impact. According to the recent testimony of the Corps official, the impact from evaporation from all of the Corps reservoirs on the Chattahoochee River totals approximately 200 cfs a day.

Conclusion

As we have all gathered in this room today, we all need to be prepared to come to the table and actively seek solutions to water supply limitations.

All of our various interests do not need to be fighting each other. We need to be working together (metro Atlanta, Lake Lanier Association, other advocacy groups, the Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and average citizens) to conserve and clean up the water we share.

Since the District's plans were adopted in late 2003, the momentum to protect water resources in metropolitan north Georgia has continued to build. The District and its local partners are beginning to see results as local communities expand their efforts to conserve water, safeguard public health and protect rivers and streams.

Thank you for your attention, I'll be happy to answer any additional questions of the committee.