ACCG NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT
*Draft 2020 - 2021 Policy Platform*

Chairman: Lannie Brant (Commissioner, Camden County)
Vice Chair: Myra Exum (Commissioner, Brooks County)
ACCG Staff: Kathleen Bowen

Conserving and enhancing our environment and the responsible development of our natural resources are issues of utmost concern both to county commissioners and to the communities they serve. As our environment and natural resources are not limited by governmental boundaries, comprehensive planning, resource conservation measures and adequate funding are essential and integral ingredients for accomplishing environmental management goals. Rising public expectations for a clean environment will place increased demands on local governments for better enforcement of existing laws and regulations. ACCG will continue to explore opportunities to enhance local governments’ authority to enforce environmental statutes.

WATER

State Water and Drought Management Planning – With water quality and quantity issues affecting all 159 Georgia counties, ACCG supports the continued development and implementation of Georgia’s comprehensive statewide water management plan (Water Plan). Notwithstanding this, ACCG recognizes that each county has unique economic and environmental circumstances and there can be no “one size fits all” solution to these complex water quality and quantity issues.

To equitably ensure the long-term success of the Water Plan, ACCG:

- Urges the Governor and General Assembly to establish a constitutionally-dedicated source of funding to successfully implement statewide water planning; assess planning performance; and conduct ongoing water quantity and quality assessments, data compilation, and regional planning development and administration for future rounds of statewide water planning. Until such time, ACCG urges the Governor to recommend and General Assembly to appropriate adequate funding in FY 2019 and subsequent years to implement the plan, utilizing the existing Regional Water Planning Council structure;

Interbasin Transfers – Georgia’s 14 river basins are long and narrow, cutting across numerous political boundaries. With 108 counties throughout Georgia lying in two or more river basins and over 1 million citizens in 28 counties currently relying on drinking water supplied from adjacent basins, ACCG recognizes that effectively managed interbasin transfers (IBTs) of water have been an essential water management tool for decades, and will continue to be so.

Furthermore, ACCG believes that the DNR Board, with input from EPD and all interested stakeholders, is in the best position to adopt any additional IBT permitting regulations. These regulations must continue to protect current and future water quality, uses, and economies of both donor and recipient basins.
**Stormwater Management** – Adequate funding is necessary in order for local governments to meet federal and state mandates in operating, maintaining and improving stormwater infrastructure and management practices.

To provide watershed protection ACCG:

- Opposes any restrictions on a local government’s ability to implement stormwater utilities; assess stormwater utility fees; create stormwater authorities; and state, state-imposed, federal or federally-imposed exemptions on a stormwater utility fee’s applicability. This is not a tax, but a fee for mandatory stormwater management services provided. Every entity contributing to stormwater runoff must pay their fair share; otherwise, the costs of these services would shift to other businesses and property owners in the form of property taxes if local governments were forced to fund this service through their general fund.

**Erosion and Sedimentation** – ACCG encourages the EPD and local governments to continue to work cooperatively toward a more comprehensive and integrated approach to stormwater impacts on water quality during both construction (erosion and sedimentation) and post-construction (stormwater management and utilities) activities.

**On-site Sewage Systems and Septage Management** – To protect public health, the environment, water quality and water quantity, ACCG recognizes the need for on-site sewage management systems to be properly installed, inspected and maintained. Accordingly, ACCG:

- Supports legislation directing local boards of health to require the periodic inspection and/or maintenance of all on-site sewage management systems within their jurisdiction, particularly applicable to systems located within water supply watersheds or other critical areas;
- Supports enhancing and better enforcing the state’s septage hauler manifest system whereby haulers are required to document their pick-up and disposal locations and to dispose of waste in a safe and legal manner, thus preventing the illegal disposal of septage;
- Opposes legislation that would prohibit local governments from regulating the location or placement of septic systems;
- Opposes legislation further limiting a local government’s ability to enact ordinances regulating the location and operation of septage or other land-application systems in their community;
- Opposes legislation that would prohibit local governments from requiring a sewer connection to any existing community system or address with an on-site sewage management system; and
- Opposes state mandates requiring local wastewater treatment plants to accept septage waste.

**LAND**

**Solid Waste Management** – ACCG strongly urges proper management of solid waste, including the implementation of incentive-based programs to achieve a significant reduction in Georgia’s solid waste stream. ACCG:

- Supports the strengthening of laws and regulations to empower local government officials to require that the siting and permitting of new solid waste handling facilities, including transfer stations, be consistent with the provisions identified in their solid waste management plans, other local ordinances and the demonstrated need for additional facilities;
- Urges that a demonstration of need procedure be established and implemented by the EPD before any new solid waste management handling permits are issued;
- Opposes legislation restricting what factors counties are permitted to consider in determining whether a proposed solid waste facility is consistent with a local solid waste management plan;
- Supports allowing local governments to assess local solid waste cost reimbursement (host) fee on solid waste received at transfer stations;
- Opposes increasing the state’s solid waste surcharge (tipping fee) from 75¢ per ton as local governments pay into the Hazardous Waste Trust Fund and oppose having the money redirected for other, non-waste-related purposes during the state’s appropriations process;
• Opposes legislation that would further restrict a county's ability to manage and direct the flow of solid waste and recyclables generated from within their county;
• Opposes legislation that would prohibit counties from including solid waste fees or assessments on property tax bills and/or prohibit counties from placing a lien against a property for unpaid solid waste fees or assessments;
• Encourages state and federal agencies to provide technical support and financial resources to counties implementing waste reduction and recycling programs;
• Encourages state and federal agencies to provide technical support, incentives and financial resources for the management, disposal and beneficial reuse of biosolids.
• Urges EPD to raise the cap for reimbursements from the Hazardous Waste Trust Fund.

• Urges the Board of Natural Resources/EPD to provide more stringent regulatory oversight for private commercial and residential collection permits; recovered materials processing facilities; and solid waste transfer stations through regulation, permit requirements and requiring compliance with local rules, regulations, plans and ordinances; and

**Land Conservation** – ACCG strongly supports programs establishing partnerships between and among the state, local governments, the private sector and other institutions to achieve land conservation goals. ACCG supports the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program and requests that funding be set aside for local government land conservation grants.

**FINANCING**

**Environmental Program Financing** – Effective environmental programs require three key elements: an appropriate legislative base, a solid implementation plan, and a stable funding mechanism. In this regard, ACCG:

• Urges the Governor and General Assembly to continue to support stable funding levels for state agencies responsible for regulatory enforcement, and for those agencies that provide valuable technical assistance to local governments;
• Urges the Governor and the General Assembly to continue to support stable funding levels for Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) programs which are invaluable for assisting local governments with building environmental infrastructure.
• Implores the General Assembly to appropriate fees and revenues collected for environmentally-related purposes (e.g., hazardous substance reporting fees, hazardous waste management fees, solid waste management fees, permit fees, and the erosion and sedimentation program’s disturbed acreage fee) for their statutorily-intended use and that the Governor’s budget reflect such dedication;
  
  o Opposes the adoption/renewal of any additional/existing environmental fees or funds, no matter their worthiness or expressed intent, until the issue of redirecting these monies to other purposes has been satisfactorily resolved either through constitutional amendment or other definitive means. Absent of this, said fees should be collected and disbursed at the local level; and

  o Opposes additional measures whereby local governments experience a negative revenue impact by state-imposed mandates to compensate landowners, either through payment or reduction in property taxes, for enforcing state or federal environmental regulations.