



**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
September 16, 2016**

The Watershed Management Authority Concept

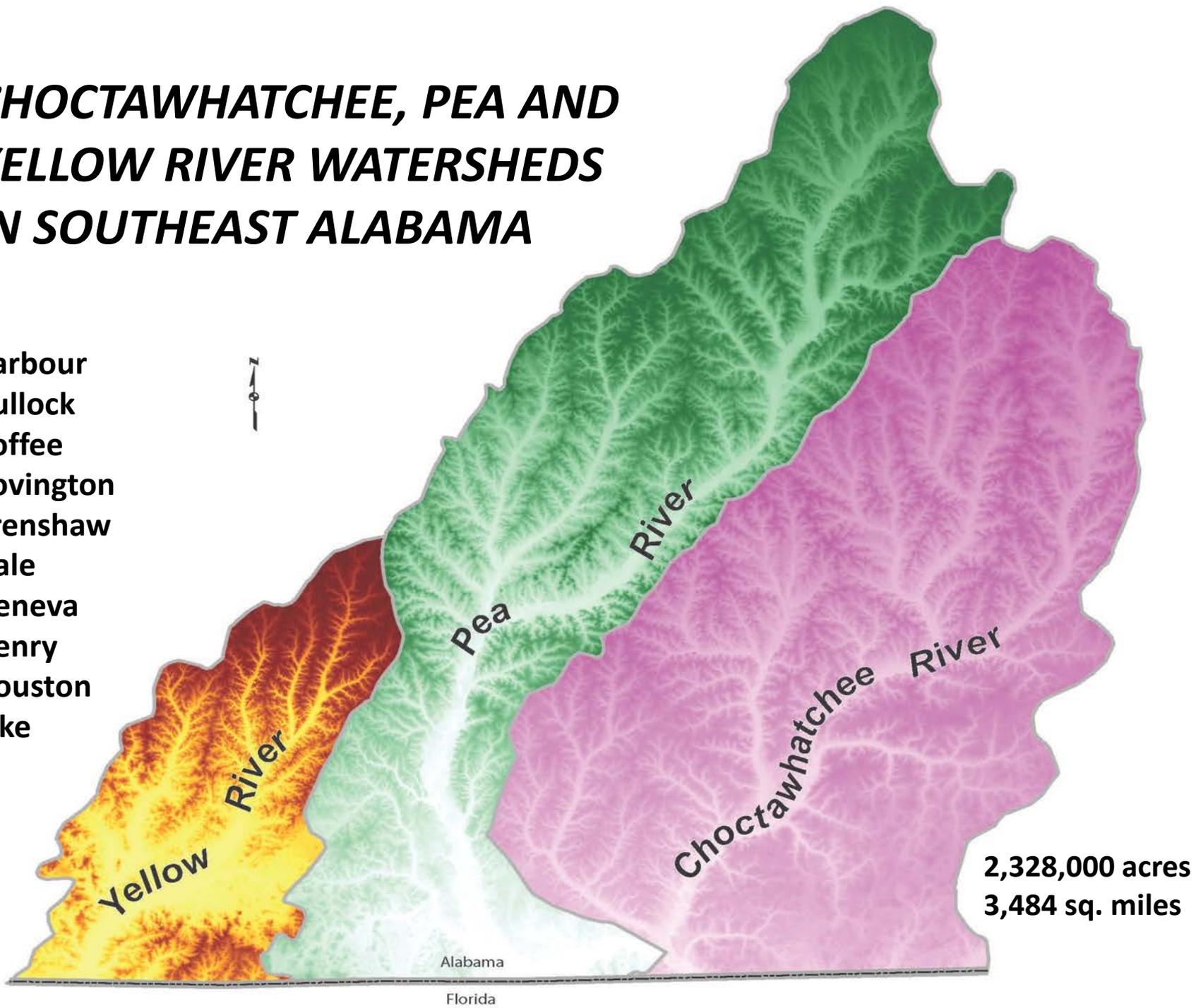
**Barbara Gibson, Executive Director
Choctawhatchee, Pea and Yellow Rivers Watershed Management Authority**

In The Beginning.....

- January 1989 - *Choctawhatchee-Pea River Improvement Association*
- May 1991 - Acct No. 91-602
- September 1991 - *Choctawhatchee-Pea Rivers Watershed Management Authority*
- 1997 - Yellow River - *Choctawhatchee, Pea and Yellow Rivers Watershed Management Authority (CPYRWMA)*
- Board of Directors – sixteen volunteer Directors

CHOCTAWHATCHEE, PEA AND YELLOW RIVER WATERSHEDS IN SOUTHEAST ALABAMA

- Barbour
- Bullock
- Coffee
- Covington
- Crenshaw
- Dale
- Geneva
- Henry
- Houston
- Pike



YELLOW RIVER

The *Yellow River* – one of the more pristine water bodies in Alabama. It originates near Opp in Covington County and drains south eventually joining the Blackwater River in Florida.

Over 56% of the watershed is forested with about 20% devoted to pasture and cropland.

Pea River

The *Pea River* – rises southeast of Union Springs in Bullock County and is the largest tributary of the Choctawhatchee River. It flows southwest and joins the Choctawhatchee River near Geneva.

About 53% of the Pea River watershed is forested with 18% in pasture and cropland.

Choctawhatchee River

Swampy headwater wetlands near Clayton in Barbour County form the east and west forks of the **Choctawhatchee River**. The forks merge near Newton to form the main stem of the river which flows south and joins the Pea River near Geneva. It is one of the longest free-flowing rivers remaining in Alabama.

Forests cover about 43% of the watershed with 26% in pasture and cropland.

WHY WATERSHED MANAGEMENT AUTHORITIES ?

- ❖ **Governmental subdivisions of State of Alabama – Act No. 91-602**
- ❖ **Formed according to nature’s boundaries – watersheds**
- ❖ **Inclusion of input at the “grass roots” level**
- ❖ **Governed by local stakeholders**
- ❖ **A proven and effective concept**
- ❖ **A successful watershed management authority has operated in Alabama for the past 25 years**

LEGISLATIVE INTENT:

“....to provide for the establishment of watershed management authorities, and to authorize said entities to protect and manage the watersheds of this state.”

PURPOSE OF AUTHORITIES:

“.....developing and executing plans and programs relating to any phase of conservation of water, water usage, flood prevention, flood control, water pollution control, wildlife habitat protection, agricultural and timberland protection, erosion prevention and control of erosion, flood-water and sediment damages.”

CREATION PROCESS

SEE HANDOUT

FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGING WATER RESOURCES

SURFACE AND GROUND WATER AVAILABILITY

Determine how much water is available from surface and ground water sources.

WATER USE

Identify all water users, determine how much water is used, for what purposes, and how the water may be used more efficiently.

ENVIRONMENTAL FLOWS

Determine how much water should remain in surface channels to support fish and wildlife populations and sustain water production functions of our natural hydrologic system.

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Identify and implement management practices necessary to meet identified needs while protecting water resources.

Some examples of water management utilizing the “*watershed management concept*” accomplished by the Choctawhatchee, Pea and Yellow River Watershed Management Authority are:

- *Conducted more than 270 scientific studies and watershed-wide projects*
- *Developed only comprehensive watershed management plan in state*
- *Operates only basin-wide Flood Warning System in state*
- *Completed hydrologic characterization of all water resources in the watersheds*
- *Participated in major levee rehab projects in Elba and Geneva, AL*
- *Mapped all groundwater aquifers in ten southeastern counties locating over 317 water wells and deep oil and gas wells*
- *Received FEMA 2001 Gulf Guardian Award for creation of Procedural Manual for Recommended Maintenance of Unpaved Roads*
- *Produced basic geographic, cultural, and scientific data for watersheds*

BASIN-WIDE FLOOD WARNING SYSTEM

The Watershed Management Authority operates and maintains the largest and only basin-wide Flood Warning System in the state. It consists of 22 rain and river gauges in eight counties which electronically monitor rainfall and stream depths. These data are used to forecast stream flood levels and are transmitted to the Emergency Management Agency offices and to the National Weather Service which utilize the data in declaring official flood warnings in these river systems.

The Watershed Management Authority is committed to understanding water issues from an information and data perspective - a perspective which would be effective in Alabama's water management future.

It has built a unified stakeholder base to not only understand complicated water resource issues but to work in a cooperative and constructive way to find creative solutions for addressing water-resource challenges in the region.

Through citizen involvement, agency coordination, and consistent research sponsorship, the Watershed Management Authority provides an excellent example of how a statewide water management plan may be implemented.

SUMMARY

The “watershed management authority” concept, embodied in the philosophy of regionally-specific, information and data-based decision making, is a proven concept that has worked in southeast Alabama and which fits perfectly into the state policy plan as a mechanism for local governance.



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