

Identifying Climate Information Needs of Water Managers in the Southeastern United States

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The Southeast Climate Consortium is a group of affiliated universities seeking to provide climate expertise and specialized analysis tools for businesses, government agencies, and individuals operating in weather- and climate-sensitive fields. A website devoted to providing tools to farmers and agricultural agents was developed and is now online at www.AgClimate.org. The Consortium is now in the process of producing a similar site for water managers across the Southeastern United States. Before the web site can be developed, however, the data and analysis needs of those involved in water management decisions were assessed to ensure that the web site would contain the most useful and understandable information possible.

A survey template to collect standardized information was developed based on similar questionnaires for AgClimate.org. Water managers and stakeholders were identified through a variety of methods. In-person and telephone interviews were conducted with 38 water managers and stakeholders in water-related fields across Georgia, Florida, and Alabama. These interviews determined how the water managers currently obtain water and climate information, what decisions they make based on this information, and what factors must be considered in making water-related management decisions.

The results of the interview process showed that federal agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers are most likely to use monthly-to-seasonal forecasts in planning reservoir releases and navigation windows. However, they were concerned with the current accuracy of national climate forecasts and did not see a good way to incorporate these forecasts operationally into their management practices. The tools that were identified as potentially the most useful include evaporation calculations on short and long time scales and development of relationships between ENSO and individual river basins. Research is currently underway to develop appropriate analysis tools to meet these needs.

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