

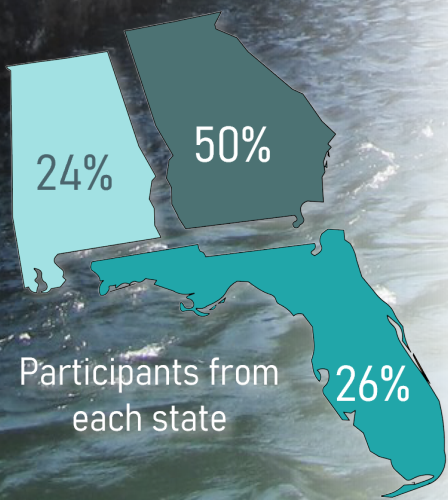
AFC River Basin Drought Tabletop Exercise

“We’re all in this together!”

Droughts are not discrete events, making it challenging to determine when drought starts and when it ends. The Apalachicola, Chattahoochee and Flint (ACF) Basin covers 19,600 square miles across Alabama, Florida, and Georgia and is home to nearly 6.8 million people. Water management in the basin is critical in both wet and dry years however, water stress becomes much more prevalent in the ACF during times of drought. The availability of ACF water resources can be limited during times of drought, and a variety of economic and environmental impacts can result. Water management in the ACF is a shared responsibility between federal, state and local governments and ultimately every entity that consumes or uses water in the ACF.

To facilitate interstate and interagency interactions on ways to address drought, the ACF Stakeholders (ACFS) and National Drought Mitigation Center hosted a drought tabletop exercise on March 1, 2023 in Eufaula, Alabama. This exercise brought together sixty participants from federal, state and local governments and utilities gathered to have an open dialogue about how they respond to different stages of drought. The exchange encouraged the sharing of ideas and opened the door to future collaborations in drought management. Most importantly, the workshop provided an opportunity to bring together stakeholders from across the region to work toward a more resilient future from the ACF Basin.

“I learned that there is already a tremendous amount of communication and coordination that is happening at multiple levels. It was very inspiring!”



Exercise objectives were to:

1. Increase awareness of roles and responsibilities for drought planning and response
2. Increase awareness of drought challenges and resources
3. Increase collaboration for drought planning, mitigation and response



Working together to share a common resource.

AFC Stakeholders

Drought Exercise

“The greatest drought-related challenge, in my opinion, is a lack of willingness for the three states to work together to view resources in the Basin as shared and work collaboratively and proactively on these problems.”

Expectations

Going into the tabletop exercise, participants shared topics they felt were important, including:

1. Renew[ing] transboundary communication and coordination
2. Building relationships between states, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and ACFS members
3. Learning about drought planning processes and tools



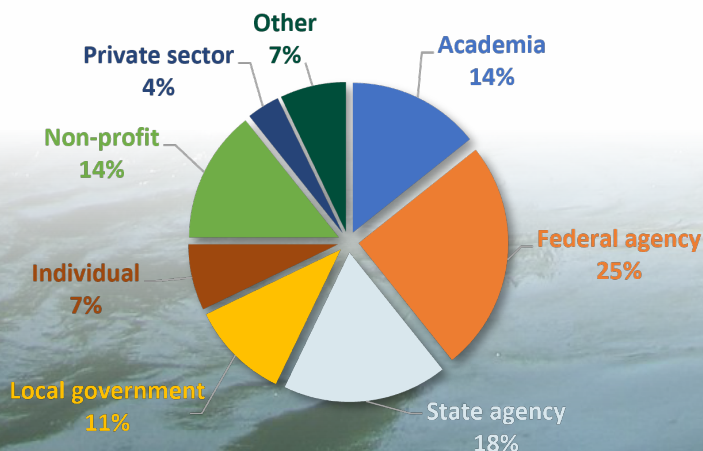
“We got the right people in the room: not just the regulators, but all the stakeholders.”

The Scenario

Participants were presented with a multi-year drought scenario inspired by past drought events. The scenarios included five different time points, including a drought advisory, drought emergency and drought recovery. At critical decision points in the progression of the drought, participants discussed their priorities, management strategies and communication plans. These discussions took place among randomly assigned groups, state agencies and stakeholders and federal entities.

In one activity, participants were asked to create their own front-page newspaper story, allowing them to highlight the information and images they felt were most relevant to communicate to the public. Topics addressed low lake levels, water restrictions, burn bans and public meetings.

PARTICIPANT AFFILIATION



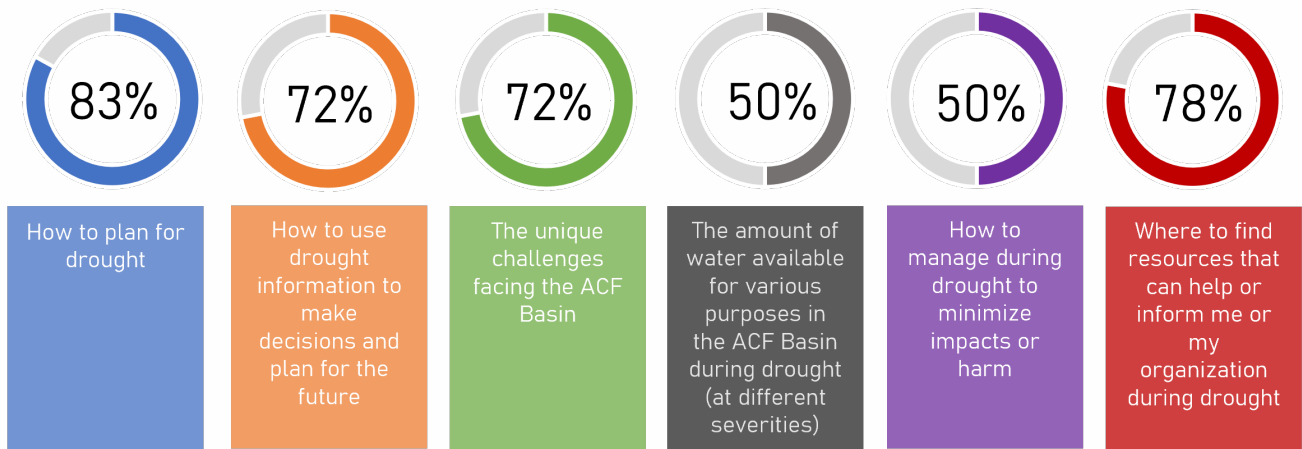
AFC Stakeholders

Outcomes/Findings

“Excellent workshop! Really well moderated and the participation was energetic across the board.”

- Participants were responsive and eager to share about their positive experience
- Effective drought management requires many layers of policy, planning and implementation to be successful
- Stakeholders impacted by drought conditions informed each other of their needs during drought
- State and federal agencies use many of the same tools to monitor and respond to drought
- Participants stated a desire and willingness to take part in a future exercise

Percent increase in familiarity with topics on drought planning, management, resources and challenges



“I learned that drought plans between states need to be more cohesive. The existing fragmentation limits coordination efforts across the ACFS.”

100%



Met a new beneficial contact for future work

88%



Learned about another person's interests or expertise that will be useful to your drought work in the Basin

94%



Discussed potential projects or collaborations

88%



Identified potential opportunities to coordinate efforts