

Panel debates interbasin water transfers

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No clear winner emerged Tuesday during a panel discussion termed "Water Wars, Georgia style" by Tom Farmer, president of the Coosa River Basin Initiative.

But it was clear that metropolitan Atlanta does, indeed, want more water funneled in from Northwest Georgia and Alabama.

"You are a water-rich community. Congratulations. You have a responsibility that goes with that," said Roy Fowler, who retired from the Cobb-Marietta Water Authority in December after 35 years and now serves as a consultant working on Georgia's Comprehensive Statewide Water Plan.

Fowler represented the

middle ground in the discussion that included CRBI Executive Director Joe Cook and Kevin Green, vice president for environmental affairs at the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce.

"Water resources in Georgia are not where the people are," said Green, who argued the estimated 62 million gallons a day of water from the Coosa basin the metro area will need as the state's economic engine in 2030 is less than 10 percent of the river's flow.

"We need a rational water plan that's based on fact ... and now is not the time to take important tools like interbasin transfers off the table," he said.

Cook challenged Green's calculations, but said the real issue is ensuring an adequate flow in the Coosa River

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even during times of drought.

"And we're also growing," he said. "Places like Rome, Columbus and Augusta are poised for growth and they have enough water. Should they sacrifice their economic future for Atlanta?"

Fowler, however, said there are ways to satisfy both sides with proper water management.

It's inevitable water-rich communities will be asked to share their resources under the Comprehensive Statewide Water Plan, he said, but the sharing must be

sustainable and coupled with wide-ranging conservation efforts.

Officials with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division will present an update on the statewide water plan and take public comments between 5:30 and 8:30 p.m. Monday at The Forum.

Cook urged area residents to attend, ask questions and make their opinions known — especially on interbasin transfers.

"This will be the plan directing how our water is used," he said. "I've always said we'd be happy to share our water with metro Atlanta, but we want it back."

When completed, the plan will go to the Georgia General Assembly for adoption and enactment of the necessary state laws.