



The Water Resources Planning Act

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The Water Resources Planning Act was passed late in 2002 and will begin to be implemented during 2003. This legislation was introduced and passed after a decade of recurring droughts, increasing water use disputes, and an aging State Water Plan. This fact sheet provides an overview of this Act and answers some common questions about what it will do.

What are the objectives of this legislation?

The major focus of this legislation is the creation of a new State Water Plan within five years and an update of that plan every five years thereafter. The State Water Plan will include information on how much water is available, how much water is being used and will be used in the future, and where water use will exceed the available water supply. The legislation also attempts to promote voluntary water conservation through education, grants, and loans.

How will the planning process proceed?

A Statewide Water Resources Committee and six regional committees will be created early in 2003 to begin to develop the components of the State Water Plan. The statewide committee will have 18 members, and each of the regional committees will have 21 members from various stakeholder groups (industry, agriculture, business, environment, government, education, etc.). The regional committees will complete and recommend the various components for the State Water Plan. The final State Water Plan will be submitted by the Statewide Water Resources Committee to the Secretary of DEP for final approval.

The purpose of the State Water plan is to serve as a policy and guidance document for a range of State, local, and private entities. It will be used to provide information on water availability; identify and prioritize water supply projects; identify ways to improve water infrastructure; provide guidance to state agencies to reduce risks of flooding, water shortages, and conflicts between water users; guide policies on activities that directly and significantly affect the quantity and quality of water available to balance; and encourage multiple uses of water resources.

How will this legislation affect local water resources issues?

One of the most important steps in this process will be the identification of Critical Water Planning Areas. The Regional Water Resources Committees will identify Critical Water Planning Areas, where water demand exceeds supply or is projected to exceed supply in the future, in their region. The regional committees will then guide the development of Critical Area Resource Plans for watersheds within the Planning Area. These plans will be created with advice from an advisory committee of local stakeholders and expert

consultants. Critical Area Resource Plans will be submitted for review and comment to all official planning agencies and the local government in each municipality within the critical area. These plans will provide guidance on water availability and future threats to water resources within the critical area.

Does this legislation allocate or permit water use or withdrawals?

No, this legislation is for planning purposes only. It does not include any regulations for any agency to allocate water withdrawals or to permit water use. As the name of the Act implies, this legislation does not provide any enforcement powers for DEP to allocate or permit water withdrawals.

Will this legislation require metering of water users?

Yes. Any water user exceeding 10,000 gallons per day will be required to register with DEP and periodically report their water use. There will be no fee for this registration and water use reporting. In some river basins, this registration and reporting of water use is already required by the area's River Basin Commission. DEP will work with the existing River Basin Commissions to avoid duplication of water use registration. The Environmental Quality Board will adopt regulations to address how water use can be measured and reported. In addition to meters, reasonably accurate alternative methods will be allowed to estimate water use especially for users of less than 50,000 gallons per day. Metering home water wells is expressly prohibited by the Act.

Will water conservation be required by this legislation?

No. This legislation creates a technical assistance center within the DEP to promote VOLUNTARY water conservation and to provide technical assistance. This will include a voluntary statewide conservation program, an education program for households and other water users, awards for outstanding water conservation efforts, and authorization of PENNVEST loans to address water loss within public water systems.

More information

For more information about this legislation, including a map of the regional water resources planning areas, visit the DEP water resources web page at:
<http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/watermgt/wc/Subjects/WaterResources/>

For more information on water resources, visit water resources Extension at:
<http://www.sfr.cas.psu.edu/water>

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