

C. Water Planning Assistance to Local Governments

Introduction

Water planning by local governments is becoming more common and more necessary in response to increasing population, increasing competition for water, and natural resource concerns. Local governments are also realizing the need to plan the future of their land and water resources in a more comprehensive manner, involving all stakeholders in the process.

Comprehensive water planning can be time consuming and costly to local governments. The State currently has some programs to provide local water planning assistance but more could be done to facilitate local water planning efforts. This issue paper describes the need for local water planning, ways in which the State currently provides planning assistance, and recommendations for improving the State's assistance to local planning entities.

The Need for Local Water Planning

As with the state government, local entities also need water plans as tools to guide future decisions affecting their regions. Without a comprehensive water planning process, decisions may be made without full consideration of potential impacts to the watershed, the water resources, and other future needs and projects. Water purveyors, sanitation districts, towns and cities, counties, irrigation districts, water conservancy districts, and general improvement districts can all benefit by implementing water planning programs. Depending upon an entity's authority, a variety of planning efforts may be desirable. For example, water plans can be developed to address drought response and emergency water supplies needs, future water and wastewater infrastructure needs, future water supply needs and options, conservation programs, flood control, land use and comprehensive watershed needs.

Local water plans are not only useful to guide decisions related to internal proposals, but they can also guide responses to the activities of others such as water rights transfers, proposed housing or industrial developments, federal environmental impact statements and environmental assessments, and state and federal planning efforts. Local water plans may be useful for identifying areas of potential conflict with other groups within the jurisdiction of the planning agency and suggest appropriate actions.

A local or regional water plan can go far in helping to address water quantity and quality issues, coordinating individual actions and developing unique information to help assess potential impacts of proposed actions. Local water planning can also create an atmosphere of cooperation between the various participants. If the planning is done in a comprehensive manner, it brings the community and stakeholders together to plan for their future. Cooperatively developed water plans can address

the needs of all stakeholders and ensure that one program, for example water supply, does not succeed to the detriment of other community and state goals such as habitat protection or water quality protection. However, planning does require time and money to develop real solutions for the long term, not just quick fixes.

There are a number of local water and watershed planning efforts currently underway in Nevada. Southern Nevada Water Authority and Washoe County have successfully developed water resource plans which are frequently updated. Elko, Eureka, Lincoln, Nye and White Pine counties are developing water plans, but with limited staffing and funding support. In addition, the Carson River Subconservancy District is developing a regional water plan for the Carson Basin. A number of research and water planning efforts are underway in the Walker River basin (which encompasses parts of Mineral, Lyon and Douglas counties) aimed at developing technical information and tools to guide water resource decisions within the basin. Utilizing a one-time federal appropriation, the Nevada Division of Water Planning has recently hired a part-time watershed planner to facilitate the coordination of the various efforts in the Walker basin. During the mid-1990s, the Humboldt River Basin Water Authority was formed, with membership from Humboldt, Lander, Eureka, Elko and Pershing counties. The Authority has defined a number of roles and responsibilities for itself, including review and comment on activities which may impact the water resources within the Humboldt River Basin, and facilitation of the development and maintenance of data and information regarding the use and management of Humboldt River Basin water resources.

Water Planning Assistance

Many local governments have limited personnel and funding resources for water planning. As a result, local governments sometimes have difficulties with: effectively developing regional water plans and updating existing plans; planning for growth; adequately addressing environmental concerns; participating in planning efforts by others, such as Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, that may affect local regions; and reviewing and commenting on federal environmental impact statements and environmental assessments for proposed projects in their area.

State water planning assistance to local governments can occur in many forms:

- Information and data sharing

The State can assist local water planning by developing, providing or increasing access to water-related data, such as water use estimates, available and committed water resources, water quality characteristics, groundwater levels, and streamflow rates.

- Financial support of local water planning efforts

The State can provide funding to support local water planning efforts. Funding could be used for the local water planning groups to hire staff and/or consultants to develop the necessary plans.

- Review of local water planning documents

By reviewing planning documents and providing input, the State can be involved in improving local planning products and reports, and the local decisionmaking process.

- Technical assistance

The State can provide technical assistance through a variety of activities such as: information and data sharing, data analysis, document review, document preparation, and map development.

- Participation in local water planning efforts

The State can be an active participant in local water planning activities by having staff attend planning group meetings, facilitate planning meetings, and/or serve on local planning boards. Such involvement represents a high level of commitment to the local process and requires that the State obligate staff and associated funding as needed for the long term.

Current Water Planning Assistance Efforts

A number of state agencies provide local water planning assistance in some form, either directly or indirectly through the methods discussed above. Following are some examples of state assistance to local water planning efforts. This list is by no means intended to be a complete discussion of all water planning assistance currently occurring within Nevada.

Nevada Division of Water Planning

The Nevada State Legislature recognizes the need for local water planning assistance and the role of the Division of Water Planning (NDWP) in providing this assistance. As stated in the Nevada Revised Statutes pertinent to NDWP, “The legislature determines that the purpose of the state’s water resource planning is to assist the state, its local government and its citizens in developing effective plans for the use of water” (NRS 540.011(4)). It is further stated that NDWP shall “Provide political subdivisions and private enterprises in arid regions with information, alternatives and recommendations bearing upon regional shortages of water including feasible selections or courses of planning and action for acquiring additional water or for conserving water now available, or both” (NRS 540.051).

NDWP has undertaken a number of activities in an attempt to satisfy these legislative directives. In fact, most of NDWP’s activities provide some form of assistance to local interests:

- NDWP has generated numerous documents covering a variety of water-related topics and has compiled many socioeconomic databases, which are made available to local planning groups. In addition, the Division maintains an extensive library of 4,000 water-related

documents which serves as an aid to other planning and research entities. NDWP handles numerous requests for these publications and database. These documents and data have been a valuable resource for both the Division and other entities throughout Nevada and the United States. To improve data and information access and distribution, NDWP has developed an Internet homepage to help interested agencies and the public obtain desired information; and for providing links to other agency's Internet sites.

- As the lead agency for floodplain management at the state level, NDWP's duties include implementation of the Flood Mitigation Assistance Grants (FMA) program and the Community Assistance Program (CAP). FMA grants to local governments are for mitigation projects aimed at reducing repetitive insurance losses and future damage. Through this program, communities can also obtain technical and financial assistance for the development and updating of Flood Mitigation Plans. The Community Assistance Program focuses on assisting communities to plan for flooding events and prevent damages by locating buildings outside the floodplain or away from alluvial fans. Staff develop and update the state model flood ordinance and assist communities in developing and implementing their own ordinances and building codes. Staff also provide training to local officials on the latest FEMA regulations and flood management technologies.
- NDWP staff regularly provide assistance to local watershed planning groups, local governments and planning groups, and private citizens. This assistance has included activities such as providing technical reviews of documents; compiling and providing data, information and reports; cosponsoring conferences and technical training sessions; facilitating the development of additional data; and participating in local planning meetings. For example, NDWP is a non-voting member of the Washoe County Regional Water Planning Commission, and has participated in local planning efforts in the Walker, Carson, Truckee and Humboldt River basins. Further, at the request of White Pine County, the Division provided input on their draft water plan outline and has provided technical data in support of their plan. NDWP also handles many telephone, written and electronic mail requests for data, information, and technical advice.
- The Division administers the AB198 Grants to Small Water Systems program. Under this program, the Board for Financing Water Projects can award a total of \$40 million dollars in grants to assist small water systems to provide better, higher quality water and become more self sufficient. Division staff review grant requests for capital improvements and work with communities to develop water system designs and financial approaches to best serve their customers. To date, 19 communities have received a total of over \$19 million dollars to fund new wells and pumps, replace aging and leaking tanks and pipes, loop lines, rehabilitate springs, and install new treatment systems.
- The *State Water Plan* is intended to serve as a planning tool for local governments. The Plan provides information on existing laws and regulations, water resources, socioeconomic characteristics, and issue discussions and recommendations which will be useful to local planning groups.

While NDWP has provided local assistance in a variety of forms, the Division has been limited in its ability to provide a higher level of support. In some instances, the Division is not able to fully participate in local planning activities due to limited funding and staffing.

Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP)

208 Water Quality Management Plans. Section 208 of the federal Clean Water Act defines the need for the development and implementation of areawide wastewater treatment management plans. Following are the five areas for which 208 plans have been developed and the agencies responsible for plan development:

<u>Planning Area</u>	<u>Responsible Agency</u>
Carson River Basin	Nevada Division of Environmental Protection
Clark County	Clark County Board of County Commissioners
Lake Tahoe Basin	Tahoe Regional Planning Agency
Washoe County	Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency
Remainder of the State	Nevada Division of Environmental Protection

As indicated by this list, NDEP provides assistance to local entities through the development of 208 plans for a majority of the State’s geographic area.

Wellhead Protection Program. Wellhead protection involves integrated resource planning and preventative actions intended to reduce the risk of contamination of the drinking groundwater supplies. In part, developing a Wellhead Protection Program (WHPP) has resulted in coordinated efforts by cooperating agencies and organizations to delineate wellhead protection areas, inventory potential and existing contamination sources, select and implement strategies for minimizing contamination potential, develop plans for locating new wells, and develop a contingency plan. NDEP provides technical and financial assistance when available to communities developing WHPPs.

Nonpoint Source Management Program. Section 319 of the federal Clean Water Act establishes the Nonpoint Source Management Program which is administered by NDEP. Under this program, NDEP provides technical and financial assistance for implementation of nonpoint source pollution control projects.

Nevada Division of State Lands. Nevada Revised Statutes 278.150 requires each city and county to prepare and adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the city, county or region. The master plan may address a variety of matters, such as water conservation, land use, population, public services and facilities, recreation and solid waste disposal. Upon request, Division of State Lands staff may provide technical assistance to the local entities during the plan development. Assistance has consisted of data sharing, document review and comment, and actual plan preparation and public meeting facilitation.

The Division of State Lands is working in cooperation with appropriate federal and state agencies and local governments to develop plans or statements of policy concerning the acquisition and use

of lands under federal management. The plans or statements of policy are developed to provide local input to federal land planning actions and require the approval of the governing board of the affected county.

Issues

Following is a summary of the main issues related to water planning assistance to local governments:

1. Many smaller governmental entities have limited personnel and funding resources for the development of local water plans; participation in planning efforts by others, such as Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service, that may affect their region; and review and comment on federal environmental impact statements and environmental assessments for proposed projects in their area.
2. Because of limited funding and staffing at the State level, NDWP and other agencies are limited in their ability to provide a higher level of assistance to local water planning efforts.
3. Other issue discussions in the *State Water Plan* present related issues:
 - “Water Use Measurement and Estimation”: The lack of comprehensive detailed water use information for some regions may impede local planning efforts.
 - “Water Resource Data Management”: Data availability and access limitations may hinder local planning.
 - “Watershed Planning and Management”: The State could further enhance watershed management and planning through additional measures.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered as mechanisms for improving the State’s support of local water planning activities:

1. The State should enhance local water planning assistance efforts through financial support and/or additional technical support from Division of Water Planning staff and other agencies.
2. The State should improve water use measurement and estimation efforts through the program defined in the “Water Use Measurement and Estimation” issue discussion.
3. The State should improve data management, coordination and sharing through the measures defined in the “Water Resources Data Development, Collection and Management” issue discussion.

4. The State should further enhance watershed management and planning in Nevada through the recommendation offered in the “Watershed Planning and Management” issue discussion.

Index - Part 3, Section 5C - Water Planning Assistance

AB198 Grants to Small Water Systems (5C – 4)
Data Management (5C – 6)
data sharing (5C – 2)
Financial support (5C – 2)
Flood Mitigation Assistance Grants (5C – 4)
Humboldt River Basin Water Authority (5C – 2)
Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (5C – 5)
Nevada Division of State Lands (5C – 5)
Nevada Division of Water Planning (5C – 2, 5C – 3)
nonpoint source pollution control projects. (5C – 5)
Southern Nevada Water Authority (5C – 2)
Technical assistance (5C – 3)
Washoe County (5C – 2)
Water Quality Management Plans (5C – 5)
Watershed Planning (5C – 6)
Wellhead Protection (5C – 5)