State Water Plan Recommended Pathways and Frameworks for Future Decisions

SECTION 5.3

Section 5.3 Recommended Pathways and Frameworks for Future Decisions

Not all water issues were resolved (or expected to be resolved) by Water Planning Council and Steering Committee member consensus during the one-year planning process.

For each of these issues, the Plan has prepared a series of Next Steps, or "Pathways Forward," which are intended to help the WPC and its stakeholders advance each unresolved issue closer to consensus.

Water Conservation

Some components of water conservation were easily brought to consensus, while others need a pathway forward to discuss appropriate next steps. Some outdoor uses such as golf courses and car washes have other societal, recreational and economic impacts that require consensus building for appropriate recommendations.

Regionalization and Interconnections

- There are pros and cons to consolidation of Public Water Systems; some smaller systems may have poor infrastructure without means to correct, however the presence of numerous systems in the state helps protect many state residents in cases where some systems may be compromised. Some stakeholders have expressed opinions that fewer Public Water Systems would increase resilience (fewer opportunities for system failures or shortfalls), while others have offered a counterpoint that the numerous smaller systems throughout the state reduce the risk of major shortfalls to larger, consolidated water and/or wastewater systems.
- The use of interconnections for emergency purposes and resiliency may be closer to consensus. In some cases, interconnections may provide opportunities for conjunctive management of water sources and flexibility to relieve environmental stress on specific sources.
- Note that while this pathway focuses on drinking water regionalization, discussions including information needs, partnerships and consensus building, are similarly applicable for wastewater: including decentralized wastewater treatment systems and small community wastewater systems, and the corresponding data needs and potential policy components.

Registered Water Diversions

- When the diversion regulations (CGS §22a-367 - §22a-379) were established in 1982, a provision was included to grandfather existing diversions through a registration process. Existing diverters were allowed to register the location, capacity, frequency, rate of withdrawal, and description of water use and water system. The registration allows for continued use of the diversion without regard to environmental effects or effects to other water users. In many cases, the volume of the withdrawals registered were the maximum ever withdrawn from the source, or the reservoir or pump capacities. Withdrawal volumes are typically much less than the registered volume, although the diverter has the right to withdraw the full registered volume. PA 04-185 allows for reporting of registered withdrawals pending development of a reporting form.

Registered Water Diversions

- There is evidence that some registered diversions are causing environmental impairments by removing water from streams. In some instances, such as the Fenton River in 2005, groundwater pumping desiccates the streambed and has caused fish kills. Climate change and/or watershed development may make this a more frequent occurrence. During development of the Plan, participants and commenters have expressed concern about the potential effects of the registered diversions and sought opportunities to remedy this. Even where registered diversions are not causing impacts, and there is not a concern, the uncertainty of timing and use of registered withdrawals may present one in the future, as the owner of the registration could exercise their rights to withdraw water at any time. However, where an impairment is being created, there needs to be a mechanism to manage the impairment. Effective policy must be established through the Plan to moderate the impact of registered diversions that are causing impairments.

Aging Infrastructure

Many water, wastewater, transportation, power and other structures and facilities necessary for public use exist in various stages of age and condition. In addition to age, locational factors including low elevations near watercourses or Long Island South make flood and storm resiliency measures also important factors when considering upgrades. In order to maintain infrastructure in good working condition, maintenance and replacement must be planned and the components need to be able to handle or quickly recover from disruptive events.

Economic Impacts

Develop a framework with which the policy recommendations of the Plan can be evaluated on economic terms

Funding for Implementation

Identify methods of funding the implementation of various policy and project recommendations and set priorities for funding.

Future Class B Water for Non-Potable Uses

Identify methods to encourage the use of Class B waters for non-potable uses, with the goal to reduce withdrawals from Class A waters or from systems that use Class A waters. Class A water are to be reserved for human consumption and potable use.

Statewide Drought Planning

Identify methods for encouragement of long-term water conservation activities, coordinated drought planning by utilities, and model ordinances for municipalities that support statewide drought planning.

Wastewater and Water Reuse

- Clarify the environmental requirements for assimilating wastewater into waterways in Connecticut, and to help clarify opportunities for wastewater reuse for non-potable water needs.

Water Use Accounting

Identify methods for tracking water usage in the state in order to support ongoing planning efforts.

Instream Flow: Ecological Flows and Stream Flow Standards and Regulations

Discussion regarding initial steps forward on this topic, possibly more so than other Pathways Forward, may need to be continued as part of consensus building.

Next Topic: Overcoming Future Challenges