

Re-Establishing State/Regional Water Supply Planning and Management

Two years ago, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) completed its regional water supply plan *Water 2050* through an inclusive process of engagement with local officials, industry, environmental groups, and others. The plan noted something that has become all too apparent with the drought of 2012 -- even in a state blessed with an abundance of water, shortages are a real concern. For example, the deep-bedrock aquifer provides half of the groundwater used in the Chicago area, yet water from that source is being withdrawn much faster than it is being replenished. The water supply available from Lake Michigan is now 96% allocated. Increases in population also are stressing demands for water. Better planning and management holds the promise of ensuring that users have adequate water for their needs well into the future and that supplies are resistant to drought.

The process that led to *Water 2050* was significant for several reasons. First, it was a partnership between the region and the state. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources Office of Water Resources (IDNR) established an overall framework for water supply planning, while CMAP led stakeholder engagement and developed the plan recommendations.¹ Second, the Illinois State Water Survey and Illinois State Geological Survey provided a rigorous scientific basis for *Water 2050* to rest upon. Third, the process began with adequate funding for the first two years as promised, but third-year funding was cut given its reliance on the state's general revenue fund. A year later, partial restoration of third-year funding followed coming from a one-time source (environmental compliance settlements) rather than a dedicated, ongoing revenue stream, and allowed for plan completion.

Unfortunately, the promise of *Water 2050* is not being kept. The IDNR has not maintained the state/regional program because it lacks ongoing funding. The state surveys are likewise unable to carry out critical data collection and analysis for lack of funding. Water supply planning and management is simply not possible without a new, dedicated revenue stream. To exacerbate the situation, the elimination of the Comprehensive Regional Planning Fund, a key source of CMAP's funding, has impaired CMAP's ability to support *Water 2050* implementation efforts. Now more than ever, the State of Illinois and the Chicago metropolitan region are vulnerable to drought, shortage, and conflicts between water users.

The program for state/regional water supply planning and management needs to be rejuvenated. To do so, a new, sustainable revenue stream needs to be established and an administrative framework for planning and management needs to be formalized. Short of this, Illinois will lack 1.) A solid foundation in science and planning; 2.) The implementation of completed regional water plans; 2.) The ability to fulfill the Water Use Act of 1983; and 4.) The resources to address unsustainable groundwater mining. Much needs to be done to maintain sustainable water supply for the region, and the State, but it can only begin with new revenues and an administrative framework.

- **Establish a New, Sustainable Revenue Stream.**

One of two options should be pursued to establish the revenue necessary to restart the state/regional water program. In the first option, a water use fee in pennies per thousand gallons of billed water use may be collected by water utilities. In the second option, a water-use permit fee system based on the highly successful Lake Michigan Water Allocation Program may be expanded to other sources (groundwater, rivers and reservoirs). In either case the fees would ideally be collected statewide to support a state/regional water supply program administered through IDNR. If this is not possible,

¹ Another plan based on a similar arrangement between the state and a regional group was developed in the Mahomet Aquifer area.

the fee and the water supply program it would support could be established in specific regions², perhaps on a county-by-county opt-in basis. The fee revenue would be spent on technical assistance, water efficiency measures, data collection, and other programs to support water supply plan implementation. If the fee is collected on a statewide basis, then it should be returned to the regions in an amount proportional to their contributions to support water supply planning and management.

- **Formalize an Administrative Framework for Water Supply Planning and Management.**

Water 2050 was developed regionally, by local stakeholders. The strategies and recommendations in *Water 2050*, reaffirmed in GO TO 2040; offer the Chicago region a foundation for water planning implementation. The state supported *Water 2050* and should continue to support regional planning efforts. The IDNR has a clear statutory mandate to conduct water supply planning and management.³ IDNR should develop and implement a strategic plan for state/regional water supply planning and management to serve as the foundation for a substantive statewide program. The state's program should be built on a solid foundation in science (Illinois' State Water and Geological Surveys are world-class institutions that collect data and create information that must be part of the state/regional framework and funded appropriately), emphasize existing regional water planning groups, establish accountability through specific performance measures to be achieved, and promote transparency through consistent reporting across all regions. IDNR's ability to do this depends on the funding option pursued.

Conclusion

Finite water supplies and increased demand call for better planning and management of our water resources. The planning process built through *Water 2050* has encouraged cooperation by bringing together stakeholders and increasing public awareness, but without an ongoing process this effort will fade. The Chicago region must recommit to sustainable water supply management with sensible policies and programs that will repay us many times over. The economic impacts of water shortage or even mere supply interruptions can be devastating. Conversely, adequate water supplies are an important condition for a strong economy.

Water 2050 provided numerous policy recommendations for the state, including carrying out the intent of several existing Illinois statutes on water supply management that are not being fulfilled. These include funding the Illinois State Water Survey to analyze the potential impacts of new high-capacity wells and surface water intakes on nearby users, and carrying out the Illinois Groundwater Protection Act by proposing a program to manage withdrawals from the deep-bedrock aquifer in northeastern Illinois, which is being depleted. None of these are possible without dedicated funding and an administrative framework for planning and management.

The Chicago region, through *Water 2050*, is ready for implementation. Without a new, dedicated funding stream and an administrative framework for planning and management *Water 2050* cannot be achieved.

² Established regional planning groups include [CMAP](#), [Mahomet Aquifer Consortium](#), and [Southwestern Illinois Resource Conservation and Development](#).

³ The Department of Natural Resources Act (20 ILCS 801/5-10) stipulates that OWR shall, "coordinate, determine, and provide ways and means for the equitable reconciliation and adjustment of the various conflicting claims and rights to water by users or uses", and "recommend legislation for the most feasible method or methods of conserving water resources and putting them to the maximum possible use"

CMAP calls for the General Assembly and Governor, working with partners in northeastern Illinois and elsewhere in the state, to re-establish state/regional water supply planning and management.

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