

The Allocation, Availability, and Maintenance of Water Resources in North Carolina

Study Summary

Overview

The 2007 General Assembly passed S.L. 2007-518 directing the Environmental Review Commission (ERC), with the assistance of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), to conduct a comprehensive study of how water resources are allocated in North Carolina. The ERC contracted the study to the School of Government at University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill and the Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions at Duke University, under the direction of Richard Whisnant and Bill Holman.

The goal for the study in 2008 is to frame options for the ERC to help inform the debate about how and whether North Carolina's water allocation and management system could be made more efficient, more equitable, and more sustainable.

Study Elements

The Principal Investigators will scope out water management policy and practice across the state and make recommendations to the ERC on the following topics:

- Allocation of water resources (surface and ground water) and their availability and maintenance in North Carolina.
- Issues related to the transfer of water from one river basin to another.
- Withdrawal of water for consumptive and nonconsumptive use.
- Whether the purposes of the Regional Water Supply Planning Act of 1971, as set out in G.S. 162A-21, are being fulfilled and, if not, how they can be fulfilled.
- Options that provide for a comprehensive system for regulating surface water withdrawals for consumptive and nonconsumptive uses.
- The governance, organization, operation, and funding of, and services provided by, publicly-owned and privately-owned public water systems.

Study Approach

The study approach is based largely upon stakeholder input, via five public meetings attended by over four hundred people in December 2007 and January 2008. Since those public meetings, the Principal Investigators of the study have been actively engaged in discussions with stakeholders representing a wide variety of sectors across the state, as well as experts in the region, country, and world. The study team will summarize and evaluate past studies and current estimates of water supply and demand in North Carolina. They will evaluate the water governance process in the state, including the key laws and policies such as registration, drought and flood response, capacity use regulations, interbasin transfer regulations, and flow regimes.

The Water Wiki

A wiki (Hawaiian for 'quick') is a collection of webpages, linked together by common words and themes, and open for additions, edits, and reading to all users. The water wiki was created for this study as a place where the principal investigators and interested stakeholders can compile findings. The goal of the water wiki is to serve as a collaborative space for discussion, debate, and hopefully consensus on the many controversial aspects of water allocation and management. Some of the topics being discussed on the wiki include: drought (2007-2008) lessons learned, car wash water use, and basinwide planning. The wiki can be accessed here: <http://water.unc.edu>

Timeline

The Principal Investigators will present a draft report of recommendations to the ERC in October 2008. The report will also highlight areas of further, more detailed study and likely resource needs for carrying out those further studies.