

Summary of Feedback on *TN H₂O: Tennessee's Roadmap to Securing the Future of Our Water Resources*

July 2019

TN H₂O: Tennessee's Roadmap to Securing the Future of Our Water Resources (the "Plan") was completed and posted on the TN H₂O website in November 2018. The Plan was made available for public feedback through the end of February 2019. The following is a high-level summary of the feedback received on the overarching recommendations from the Plan.

Addressing current and impending infrastructure needs

Many of the commenters agreed that current and impending infrastructure needs should be addressed. Several location-specific comments focused on quality issues or the inability to access water supply. Others commented on the need for more regionalization of utility providers and regional integrated resource planning. There was also feedback regarding the insufficiency of local funding alone to address the needs, as well as a suggestion for the use of the state revolving fund to provide guarantees to municipalities for private loans. One commenter suggested that Tennessee take the opportunity the Plan presents to re-think how it pays for growth to ensure that costs are fairly distributed. There was also feedback focused on water quality issues and the need to protect the source.

Developing an educational campaign regarding the value of water and natural resources

Most of the feedback received was in support of this recommendation. One commenter indicated that those in the environmental community have long-noted the need to raise the level of awareness and importance of water to the protection of the quality of life and economy. Some feedback suggested that education should begin at the pre-school or elementary school level. A comment suggested the development of online resources, K – 12 curricula and a "Year of Water" education campaign, in addition to other efforts. Feedback was received that messaging should be delivered by institutions that are trusted by the audiences they are intended for. One comment suggested that Tennessee adopt use of the educational tools that EPA has already developed rather than starting from scratch. Another commenter said that although education makes many feel good, the most effective way to get people to conserve water is through the pocketbook.

Chartering a state water-resources task force or advisory committee (group) focused on proactive water-resources management

Support of this recommendation varied among those providing feedback. Some feedback received indicated that a task force or advisory committee would become too political and would create another unnecessary layer of bureaucracy. Others supported establishing a group with the caveats that:

- its purpose and function is distinguished from other existing entities at the local, state and federal level;
- it has a diverse membership; and
- it is given sufficient authority to identify failures of existing departments and enforce compliance.

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Other commenters felt that the goals of the Plan could be pursued through existing departments and agencies by more effectively using authority currently possessed under existing statutes. One commenter suggested that the voluntary structure used to develop the Plan be continued with the support of the Governor and legislators.

Evaluating existing laws (e.g., Water Resources Act, Watershed District Act, Water Quality Control Act) for possible full implementation

Feedback was received that suggested the focus should be on increased enforcement of these existing laws. One commenter recommended that more analysis be conducted to determine why the Water Resources Act has not been implemented in over 50 years, and why the watershed districts established under the Watershed District Act have dwindled to a tenth of their original number. Another commenter suggested conducting a gap analysis to determine where the implementation of existing laws with expected funding would likely result in the TN H₂O-identified water resource management needs not being attained. Feedback also noted that it may be more productive to designate a specific entity to have the legal responsibility to enact and enforce these laws.

Developing a comprehensive water resources planning process and planning cycle

Most of the feedback received was in support of this recommendation. Some commenters stated that the focus should be on addressing data gaps by expanding water use reporting across the state and establishing criteria to determine geographic areas of potential stress. One commenter felt that a critical first step would be establishing a central database for agencies responsible for various water-related efforts. Another commenter suggested that an on-going planning process of a 5, 10, and 20-year cycle requires full-time paid staff and should not be conducted using volunteers. Some feedback suggested it best that the state "starts small" to get this process launched and use the results of prior planning efforts as a blueprint for what needs to be done.

Using the state water-resources task force or advisory committee and regional water-resources jurisdictions to facilitate intrastate and interstate regional cooperation

Feedback on this recommendation was mixed, since a portion of the responders did not support the establishment of a task force or advisory committee (see summarized responses to the earlier recommendation). Of those that did support the recommendation, commenters stated that water does not start or stop at the state boundary so this is a necessary pursuit with a number of existing national models. Another commenter suggested that such an entity would add value to future discussions related to interstate and intrastate water resource management needs; however, their role should be clearly defined and distinguishable from other existing entities.

Identifying sustainable funding for all TN H₂O recommendations

Some of the commenters stated that any funding identified should not be an additional burden to taxpayers. They suggested the re-evaluation and prioritization of existing expenditures and fee systems

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and the pursuit of additional federal funds. Other feedback suggested redirection or amendments to existing tax structures (e.g. Tennessee Lottery) or the passage of a returnable bottle bill or penny tax on each gallon of water used. Other commenters cited the Chattajack paddleboard/kayak race or the governmental / non-governmental entity partnership exemplified by the Tennessee Healthy Watershed Initiative as potential models for funding. One commenter felt that it would be appropriate for the Governor and State Legislature to commit some level of baseline funding to support planning, monitoring, and analysis activities recommended in the Plan since it would be likely to leverage greater public and private investments.

Other ideas or comments you'd like to share?

There were a number of responses provided to this question, as well as on the question of feedback on specific sections of the Plan.

In addition to some location-specific feedback, there were comments indicating the need for increased enforcement of existing storm water requirements and forest clearing, as well as increased regulation of industry. Others suggested more communication with industry stakeholders prior to considering / adopting any additional proposals.

Some noted the acknowledged "limiting factors" of the Plan and stated that policymakers and stakeholders must have a better understanding of water use before the recommendations could be implemented fully. One response stated that additional input and refinement to the Plan are warranted and that it should be a "living document" with changes made periodically.

Some commenters supported starting with the consolidation of existing water data (currently housed in numerous places) and evaluating the consolidated data to determine the true issues.

Others urged the reintegration of water quality considerations with water quantity.

There was also feedback encouraging the implementation of water conservation and efficiency incentives, fee structures that encourage more efficient water use, as well as, water reuse considerations where appropriate.

Conclusion

The majority of those providing feedback agreed that current and impending infrastructure needs should be met and that an educational campaign should be developed regarding the value of water and natural resources. Most commenters also felt that there is a need for comprehensive water resources planning. However, the feedback varied on the framework to be used for implementation of the Plan's recommendations, as well as the source of the funding to support it.