

Tennessee Leaders Developing Plan To Address Future Water Needs - Chattanooga Times Free Press

Tuesday, July 10, 2018 | 10:38am

from [Chattanooga Times Free Press](#)

The Haslam administration's swan song will aim to address Tennessee's water needs for generations, as global leaders fear water scarcity will impact much of the world's population.

Scientists and other environmentalists [warn water scarcity](#) is the largest global risk in terms of potential impact. Representatives from city, Hamilton County and state agencies met with private groups Tuesday morning at Chattanooga's Eastside Utility District to discuss a new potential water plan — TN H2O — that could ensure Tennesseans have an adequate water supply for decades.

"Water is one of our most valuable resources," Hamilton County Mayor Jim Coppinger said. "The way it serves here in Hamilton County is extremely important. It does attract people to the county because of the river and the resources we're able to offer."

As Gov. Bill Haslam's term comes to an end, he asked state agency representatives what they'd like to achieve before he leaves office. They told him ensuring access to affordable water was a top priority.

Tennessee's population is expected to double in the next 50 years. Although the state now has an abundance of water — a fact that has led to a [dispute with Georgia](#) — state leaders are concerned residents could be impacted as the world's water supply becomes increasingly strained.

"That's what this is about, really," Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation commissioner Shari Meghreblian said. "It's about trying to take a proactive approach and have a plan in place."

TDEC is leading the development of the plan. A committee of 28 people from public and private sectors, academic institutions and environmental organizations have been appointed to a steering committee to manage the project. The plan will focus strictly on future water quantity, Deputy Gov. Jim Henry said. Other federal and state regulations will continue to focus on quality.

Project leaders know the end goal: to address the state's future water quantity. Now they must determine how to achieve it. To do that, committee members have been traveling across the state to get input about what the plan should entail. The plan is expected to be released for public comment in October.

Local water leader Val Armstrong, president of Tennessee American Water, is a member of the steering committee. She is hopeful the plan will meet the water needs of Tennessee residents well into the future.

"Our goal is to make sure we're planning for future generations," she said. "We don't want to kick the bucket for someone else to solve this issue. We want to be strategic and begin to think about the best steps for us to take to ensure for continued water abundance."

The Haslam administration hopes to have the framework of the plan in place before leaving office.

"This is a huge thing," Henry said. "Governor Haslam thinks this is one of the things we need to do to prepare the next administration to be a little bit better about protecting our resources."