

5. Path Forward

Introduction

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is grateful to the team of enthusiastic professionals who developed the 2022 State Water Plan Update (updated State Water Plan) priorities and recommendations and the insightful DEP staff who provided program input. The regional and statewide committee members volunteered their time and worked tirelessly for two years to combine diverse expertise and experiences into the updated State Water Plan. A consistent message provided by committee members was for the updated State Water Plan to be an actionable and implementable plan for the betterment of water resources in Pennsylvania.

The path forward for the updated State Water Plan will be a phased or incremental implementation of the 2022 State Water Plan Update priorities developed during the update towards improving, sustaining, and managing Pennsylvania's water resources.

Phase One

Phase one tasks will be initiated during the first year of the updated State Water Plan and will focus on educating the public on the research and recommendations provided in the update and instituting outreach efforts to engage key stakeholder constituencies with the plan's implementation. Under this phase, DEP will take advantage of opportunities in working with community liaisons within Environmental Justice (EJ) communities and areas to improve local engagement by providing information about the State Water Plan, soliciting participation on committees or workgroups and providing feedback on State Water Planning activities through public commenting. Activities may include but are not limited to:

- Bringing a prominent level of public awareness to the State Water Plan including opportunities for education and outreach on water resources data, water resources issues, and the recommendations developed in the updated State Water Plan.
- Establishing paths for recruiting and maintaining interested and experienced individuals for participation in the State Water Plan statewide and regional committees.
- Developing education and training content for Clean Water Academy learning modules.
- Continuing engagement of the statewide and regional committees through scheduled meetings and establishing of applicable workgroups. Principal work will include:
 - Establishing DEP agency groundwork for Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) initiatives including examining alternative approaches for optimum agency, programs, and stakeholder engagement with committees and workgroups.
 - Completing any outstanding Critical Area Resource Plans (CARPs), and rank priority recommendations that would lead to developing implementation workplans. During this exploratory time, stakeholders will be consulted, fundamental questions will be answered, and programmatic solutions assessed.
 - Initiating steps in support of legislative priorities.

- Identifying metrics for measuring success of initiatives of the updated State Water Plan.
- Explore elements of a continuous planning process with input from the statewide committee for the program to effectively address environmental goals through agility in addressing changing priorities and meeting short term needs while being prepared for longer term initiatives. Continuous planning approaches would improve state water planning progress by eliminating long gaps between planning periods and a frequently updated State Water Plan.
- Prioritizing the statewide and regional committee’s recommendations for implementation during subsequent planning phases.

Phase Two

Phase Two will occur during years two and three of the updated State Water Plan implementation and will focus on defining and implementing strategies, tasks, activities, and projects for the prioritized recommendations developed by the statewide and regional committees and the development of measurable success indicators when possible. Activities may include:

- Development of implementation activities for the recommendations developed by the workgroups of the statewide committee.
- Developing recommendations on the role of agriculture on water resources sustainability in the future.
- Identification of measurable outcomes to be achieved for the implementation activities.
- Continuing development of the logic models on the regional priorities identified by each of the regional committees and including activities, resources, outputs, and intermediate and long-term outcomes.

Phase Three

Phase Three activities will occur primarily during years four and five of the updated State Water Plan implementation and will focus on continuation of the implementation activities initiated in Phase Two, evaluation of the progress being achieved, and refocusing or development of new activities to achieve the desired results. Activities may include:

- Evaluation of activities initiated or completed by the statewide and regional committees and progress being achieved.
- Identification of new activities than can be initiated by committee or workgroups.
- Initiation of the process for producing the required 5-year report by DEP determining whether the State Water Plan and any ongoing revisions and updates reflect the objectives, policies, and purposes of Act 220.

Additional Implementation Details

Education and Outreach

Everyone within the commonwealth will be affected by the State Water Plan’s initiatives and their degree of success. Education and outreach initiatives should be designed to provide a “big picture” overview of the

future of water resources in Pennsylvania and a more specific and localized impression of how each region and municipality within Pennsylvania can support the work being done to preserve and protect Pennsylvania's vital water resources. Education and outreach initiatives will focus on implementing recommendations at the state, county, and local levels, building collaborative planning efforts and solutions, and developing community buy-in.

DEP will be the leader in developing and coordinating the implementation of education and outreach initiatives of the updated State Water Plan. DEP's leadership in developing educational resources and coordinating the outreach efforts will ensure the updated State Water Plan's content and priorities are accurately communicated to the public. State, regional, and local government agencies must be made aware of the updated State Water Plan's priorities and action initiatives and encouraged to support activities to integrate planning and the sharing of resources to achieve the desired goals and outcomes.

Education and outreach awareness programs will be designed to create and deliver an impactful, consistent message about the importance of goals, initiatives, and success metrics of the updated State Water Plan at the state and local levels. They will provide region-specific information about the updated State Water Plan, as well as information tailored to address participants' specific interests. The education and outreach strategy will include in-person and virtual presentations, webinars, and printed educational materials. These multi-media approaches will convey important background information and the action plans that will be developed.

The education and outreach program for communicating the updated State Water Plan includes the following:

- Development of key messaging materials outlining the importance of the updated State Water Plan recommendations and initiatives and supportive background information prepared by DEP staff. Materials include a one-page written overview, a Microsoft Power Point slide deck for presentations, newspaper and newsletter articles, links to the DEP website for additional information, and webinars posted on the DEP Clean Water Academy.
- Presentations on the updated State Water Plan offered by DEP Staff and statewide committee and regional committee members at state conventions of local government organizations and watershed, environmental, and water supplier organizations.
- As time permits, select regional presentations and workshops to support community education, awareness and participation and understanding of region priorities and initiatives. Regional presentations will be facilitated by regional committee members and DEP staff.
- Initiatives in working with local governmental liaisons in developing steps to outreach to local or regional EJ areas in highlighting available educational materials about the State Water Plan, its priorities, and implementation of actions. Opportunities will be taken to achieve participation in committees, and workgroups as well as providing public input during planning phases.

Legislative Priorities

The Pennsylvania Legislature maintains important roles in water resources management by passing laws that together, with federal legislation, provide the authority for environmental regulation. The legislature further develops budget bills giving the financial resources to agencies, and other entities to sustain and expand environmental protection and restoration work.

This financial assistance is needed from state and federal governments to support local initiatives and ease the burden on local communities. Imposing state legislative requirements on local communities that do not have

the financial resources through unfunded mandates will not resolve the many challenges facing local communities.

The State Water Plan Statewide Water Resources Committee has identified legislative priorities for the next five years and identified the top priorities to be addressed. Many of the priorities are requesting increased funding from the commonwealth or federal agencies to support the protection of water resources and the managing of stormwater and flooding.

A top priority identified by the statewide committee and various regional committees was the passage of legislation to establish private water well construction standards. Residents in many rural areas use a private well as their source of drinking water. Establishing required proficiency-based licensing and certification of water well drillers and the establishment of statewide private well construction standards is critical to preserving safe drinking water for these rural areas.

The statewide committee's next steps for pursuing the legislative agenda over the next five years includes the following:

- Strategically building broad coalitions including but not limited to stakeholders, watershed organizations, advisory committees, and commonwealth as well as other partnering agencies.
- Prioritizing the list of fifteen priorities and recommendations for legislative action over the five-year implementation period of the updated State Water Plan.
- Identify key experts within the statewide committees, regional committees, and DEP who can develop white papers on each of the priority issues that defines the positive outcomes of action and the budget impact.
- Hold educational meetings with legislators who will be influential in addressing the issues.
- Testify before legislative committees to advocate for proposed legislation and increases in funding.

Statewide Committee Priorities

The statewide committee established strategic workgroups to review the recommendations and achievements of the previous State Water Plan, review current research on the topics and develop recommendations for moving Pennsylvania forward. These strategic topic areas address water resources use and management holistically and systemically within Pennsylvania. The statewide committee recognizes that improvements to the water resources of Pennsylvania will be strengthened through coordination of effort at all levels of government, the adequate funding of new and replacement infrastructure, and the ameliorating of water management challenges such as stormwater, flooding, contaminants, and legacy issues. The workgroups focus areas identified by the statewide committee are:

1. Integrated water resource management and coordination across state agencies
2. Water withdrawal and use
3. Water efficiency
4. Drinking water and wastewater sustainable infrastructure
5. Contaminants of emerging concern
6. Floodplain and stormwater management
7. Legacy issue impacts
8. Funding DEP and regional projects

The statewide committee workgroups have identified recommendations for each of the topics identified and are included in the updated State Water Plan. The path forward for each of these recommendations is to identify an action plan for moving the recommendations into implementation and provide a successful outcome. The path forward includes the following activities:

- Continuation of convening the statewide committee three times per year to review progress on the priorities and recommendations of each workgroup.
- Regular meetings of the workgroups to advance the recommendations developed. Activities include prioritizing the recommendations, developing specific outcomes or impact results for each recommendation, identifying activities, initiatives, or projects that will move the recommendations forward, and identifying key stakeholders who can contribute or advance the activities.
- Completing regular assessment of progress on the recommendations.
- Engaging key experts and stakeholders in the field to support the work of the workgroup members on each initiative.

Regional Committee Priorities

Updating the State Water Plan has engaged the work of six regional committees. The regional committees have each identified two priorities for the region, identified the region's unique characteristics, identified stormwater and flood management concerns, and created climate change adaptations for water resources. The six regional committees of the State Water Plan are:

- Delaware Region
- Lower Susquehanna Region
- Potomac Region
- Ohio Region
- Great Lakes Region
- Upper Middle Susquehanna Region

Each regional committee has developed a logic model action plan for each priority of the region. The logic models include priority, long term, and intermediate outcomes to be achieved to improve in the priority area, activities, and outputs to be completed, and resources available to support the work of the committee. The path forward for each regional committee includes the following activities:

- Continue to meet three times annually to clarify and prioritize activities for each priority.
- Assign action steps for committee members to support the activities and initiatives.
- Assess progress on activities and the outputs and outcomes achieved.
- Continue to engage region and community stakeholders through education and outreach of the updated State Water Plan.
- Completion and finalization of Critical Area Resource Plans that are in development.

Path Forward

DEP staff and 150 professional volunteer committee members worked diligently for two years to create the updated State Water Plan. The updated State Water Plan is important to all Pennsylvanians as it outlines the path forward to preserving and managing our valued water resources. Addressing the priorities and implementing the recommendations will move Pennsylvania forward in a positive direction in achieving this goal.

