

Public Information & Involvement State Water Plans

Briefing Paper

States have adopted a variety of mechanisms to ensure that stakeholder groups and the public have the opportunity for involvement in the water planning process. These include the creation of advisory committees, focus groups, and the use of public meetings and hearings.

Kansas

Kansas' legislation directs the Kansas Water Office and the Kansas Water Authority to "seek advise from the general public and from committees consisting of individuals with knowledge of [or] an interest in water issues and in the water planning areas" (K.S.A. 82a-903). Basin advisory committees, representing the 12 major river basins of the state, meet at least quarterly in highly publicized meetings at which the public is encouraged to attend. In addition, K.S.A. 82a-905 sets out public hearing and public notice requirements that are mandatory for reviewing all new Kansas Water Plan sections or subsections (Kansas Water Office, Kansas Water Plan, 2000).

Montana

The Montana State Water Plan Advisory Council, a governor appointed decision-making body, solicits water management concerns through the use of focus groups composed of water users, resource managers, and the public. Once identified and selected, Technical Advisory Committees (for statewide issues) or Citizen Advisory Committees (for basin-specific issues) analyze the problems, develop options, and recommend actions. The state also provides for public participation through workshops and special meetings, scoping meetings, public comment on draft plan sections via open houses and public hearings on plan adoption (Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Strategic Plan, 1998).

Nevada

The state's water planning process involved thousands of citizens by initially soliciting public input to determine the scope of the plan and the issues to be addressed through a series of Water Policy Forums (sponsored by the Nevada Cooperative Extension and others). Public input was also solicited throughout plan development in public workshops (sponsored by the Division of Water Planning) to gauge the relevancy of the issues and appropriateness of recommendations. Final public review of the draft plan was accomplished by distributing over 1000 copies and by making the draft plan available on the Division of Water Planning's website. Comments were entered into a database, evaluated and analyzed (Nevada Division of Water Planning, Nevada State Water Plan, 1999).

In addition, Nevada's legislation directs the governor to appoint an Advisory Board on Water Resources Planning and Development for the Division of Water Planning that has the following responsibilities:

- to advise the division on matters related to the planning and development of water resources;
- to advise and make recommendations through the division and the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to the governor concerning policies for water planning and the development of water resources;
- to advise the administrator concerning the policies of the division and areas of emphasis for the planning of water resources; and
- to review, and provide written recommendations to the division regarding the water plan.

The advisory board is made up of representatives of counties, water utilities, one representative of the general public, and four members, each of whom represent one of the following interests: farming, mining, ranching, and wildlife (540.111 (9)).

North Dakota

North Dakota shifted its reliance from the input of Citizen Advisory Boards, comprised of appointed representatives, to a streamlined and open public involvement process including:

- three rounds of eight public meeting in major population centers;
- 2500 random public surveys consisting of 17 questions;
- 67 water management board surveys;
- federal agency committee input;
- state agency committee input;
- non-governmental organization committee input;
- major project committee input; and
- technical oversight committee input (North Dakota State Water Commission. State Water Management Plan, 1999).

Utah

The Utah Division of Water Resources writes the initial draft water plan and provides it to a state coordinating committee comprised of 11 water-related state agencies for review and comment. The revised plan is then provided to local advisory groups that represent various stakeholders for review and comment. The draft plan is released for comment in public hearings (Utah Division of Water Resources, Utah State Water Plan, 1990).