

Indiana Needs a Statewide Water Resource Plan and One Agency or Cabinet-Level Appointment to Focus on Water

The threats and demands on Indiana's water resources are profoundly different around the state depending on local conditions. Therefore, the detailed planning and management of water is best done regionally, with collaboration among state and local governments and organizations. This collaboration, however, must be strategically focused on accomplishing a statewide vision. And that vision can't be realized without oversight by one agency or cabinet-level advisor charged with developing and maintaining a statewide strategy for the following reasons:

1. Indiana has a lot of water. But it also has a lot of heavy industries that use that water. And the number of water thirsty industries will only increase with funding from the CHIPS Act aimed at incentivizing the semiconductor industry to locate in Indiana, as well as the growth of the LEAP Innovation District in Lebanon, which aims to locate several water-heavy industries in an area that lacks sufficient water resources.
2. Despite repeated recommendations from legislative task forces to centralize the state's water management efforts into one agency, there are currently eight government agencies that share some aspect of regulating, managing or monitoring Indiana's ground and surface water resources.¹ With so many agencies involved, there are inefficiencies and regulatory gaps, and data about water use and water quality is disjointed and difficult to find.
3. In 2014, Indiana ranked first in the country in the percentage of the state's economy that depends on water. More than 23 percent of Indiana's current economy depends on the state's lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, and aquifers. This water use translates into nearly \$70 billion, which is a huge fraction of Indiana's GDP.²
4. Indiana uses an absolute dominion rule when it comes to groundwater usage, which means that, generally speaking, a limit does not exist as to how much groundwater a landowner can withdraw. While the Indiana Department of Environmental Management has a groundwater monitoring network, it needs to be expanded throughout the state to ensure that sufficient groundwater supplies remain and are not depleted for all users.
5. Any statewide water resource plan must involve all stakeholders who are concerned about the water quality and quantity in Indiana to ensure the plan is developed based on a holistic view of water issues from a variety of perspectives including from agriculture, business, conservation and environmental protection groups, scientists, local government, and other sectors.

1. Indiana Chamber of Commerce, 'Modernizing The State's Approach To A Critical Resource' Report, 2014; Conservation Law Center, 'The Case For Action: Fresh Water Indiana' 2016; 2018 Legislative Task Force on Water Infrastructure; 2019 Legislative Task Force on Storm Water; 2021 Legislative Task Force on Waste Water Infrastructure.

2. Indiana Chamber of Commerce, 'Modernizing The State's Approach To A Critical Resource' Report, 2014.