

Indiana Water Policy

Looking Toward the Future



**State Sen.
Ed Charbonneau**

Since the drought in 2012, Indiana has been working to clarify water policy in a way that ensures clean, safe drinking water for all Hoosiers while protecting our manufacturing and agricultural economy.

Over the last four years, Indiana has taken careful steps to guarantee that any change in policy on water supplies and infrastructure is backed by valid data and information. In 2012, the General Assembly passed legislation that directed the state to collect data on how utilities planned for changes in water supply.

In 2015, there was a survey of water utilities in the largest 15 communities, along with five smaller systems, that found near unanimous interest in planning for the future and knowing more about the growing withdrawals of neighboring water users.

After the catastrophe in Flint, Michigan, the state conducted another survey that included almost every community water system in Indiana. The purpose was to understand how each one invested in replacement of aging infrastructure and how well each system understood water losses due to leaking, aging infrastructure.

Survey says

The results were staggering.

The 2016 survey found that the need for infrastructure vastly outpaces investments. Collectively, we need more than \$2.3 billion to begin replacing the aging pipes, treatment plants and fire hydrants that treat and deliver water in our communities. Further, after that initial replacement, using basic assumptions about how fast pipelines and plants depreciate, the utilities across the state need more than \$800 million per year in new funding.

This same survey showed that small systems are both more expensive to operate and less resilient to the changes that are affecting health and safety.

This year, while no funding was dedicated to water infrastructure, the legislature was active in addressing water policy. In anticipation of a federal infrastructure bill, legislation was passed to set up an infrastructure assistance fund for utilities. The Indiana Finance

Authority is directed to investigate the future needs of the utilities and determine their ability to provide water for growing populations.

Another bill directs the state to set up a transboundary groundwater authority to avoid interstate conflict that has become a problem among neighboring states. Finally, legislation was passed to allow utilities to look further ahead when developing new supplies and, if needed, make it affordable to replace lead service lines so homeowners can be confident the water they drink is as pure as what comes from the water treatment plant.

Taking the next steps

All of these bills move the state in the right direction, but eventually we need to manage Indiana's water resources. That task is complicated by the fact that Indiana has more than 500 water utilities, but less than 100 of them are under the jurisdiction of the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission.

As a riparian state, users can withdraw what they need. On the other hand, it makes sense that the state provides information about growth rates in use and even how that use affects the various watersheds existing in Indiana. This will allow the many water users to adapt their behavior to the circumstances.

Protecting the economy means making sure that utilities manage our water resources together. Protecting agricultural production in the state means helping farmers see how often they can pump and how closely they can install new irrigation wells. We need experience tracking use in watersheds to ensure Indiana can thrive.

The future of Indiana is bright. We have plenty of water, but we need to become better stewards as we seek to maximize the benefits of our regionally abundant water supplies.

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