Public Comments on the Water Plan

Governor’s Water Conference and OWRRI Water Research Symposium
October 24, 2007
Why involve the public?

- To provide information about water resources and their management in Oklahoma.
- To identify the issues, concerns, questions, and suggestions that are important to the people of Oklahoma.
- To engage citizens in deliberations about the contents of the water plan.
- To increase public support of water plan provisions.
Importance of Process

- A good process leads to a better plan and more support for its implementation.

- The OCWP process is designed to be FIT:
  - **Fair** = unbiased, representative of all interests, accessible information
  - **Inclusive** = open to all who want to participate – via meetings, website, email, postal mail, telephone, fax, or personal visits
  - **Transparent** = meeting dates, places, and agenda are public; proceedings are open to the public; reports are readily available
Public Participation Process

- Local Input Meetings (2007)
- Regional Input Meetings (2008)
- Planning Workshops (2009)
- Town Hall Meeting (2010)
- Draft OCWP (2010)
- Final OCWP Plan Review (2011)
- Reactions & Implementation Suggestions (2011)

Development of Management Alternatives
Issue Consolidation & Prioritization
Issues, Concerns, Questions & Suggestions
Local Input Meetings

Meeting Statistics

- 35 of 42 meetings conducted (April-November)
- 1820 persons attended (52 per meeting on average)
  - 38 State legislators
  - ~160 State agency officials
  - ~120 Local officials (commissioners, mayors, managers, planners, engineers, utility reps)
- 1850 comments received (53 per meeting)
  - 1700 comments received at the meetings (oral and written)
  - 150 comments received after the meetings (website, email, postal mail, telephone, fax)

Reports

- 42 LIM reports
- Newsletter updates, conferences, visits
Regional Input Meetings

- 11 meetings (COG regions) in 2\textsuperscript{nd} half of 2008

**Purposes**
- Ensure that full range of issues have been identified
- Consolidate issues into issue categories
- Prioritize issues for planning workshops

**Participants**
- Discussants nominated by the public
- Selection based on knowledge of water issues, willingness to engage in respectful and reflective deliberation, and commitment to full process
- Facilitated proceedings are open

**Reports**
- Statewide and 11 regional LIM reports
- Preliminary issue categorization scheme
- Statewide and 11 RIM reports
- Twelve issue-theme reports
Participation Website

- http://okwaterplan.info

**Statistics**
- More than 7,000 hits (avg = 35/day)
- Average visit = 6 minutes, 3 pages
- 125 comments received
- 730 subscribers to email list

**Features**
- Check meeting dates and locations
- View meeting reports
- Search comments
- Offer a comment or ask a question
- Nominate future participants
- Join e-mail list
Comment Summary

Water Quality  Economic Development  Water Quantity
Water Conservation
Cultural Issues  Property Rights
Water Transfers
Frequent Comments (p.1)

- New EPA DW standards increase cost of WQ testing
  - Small systems want additional State or Federal funding
- Economic impact of water recreation and tourism should be assessed and better appreciated
  - Decreased lake levels cause nearby communities to suffer; thus, State should set minimum lake levels and stream flows
- Water conservation measures should be instituted
  - Provide incentives to decrease water usage
  - Meter all water wells (with State verification)
  - Control salt & red cedars, especially in west & central Oklahoma
- Conjunctive use of water should be considered in planning
  - State should recognize interaction of surface and ground water
Frequent Comments (p.2)

- Water rights, as a property right, should be protected
  - Right to drill water wells and use groundwater is essential to many landowners, especially farmers, ranchers, and municipalities
  - Surface water “use or lose” provision should be evaluated

- Environmental flows
  - State should recognize ecological uses of water and define minimum in-stream flows

- No government unfunded mandates
  - Especially to rural water districts and small communities

- Infrastructure needs more state and federal funding
  - For installation, repair, and maintenance of water supply infrastructure

- Aging reservoirs & flood control dams need maintenance
  - Many are reaching their design life spans

- Industrial users should use low quality water
  - e.g., oil and gas, commercial animal operations, and quarries
Frequent Comments (p.3)

- Regionalization of water systems should be examined
  - To accommodate urban expansion and to save money on water treatment, distribution, and management
- Water quality should be addressed in the plan
  - Concerns about GW and SW; threats from toxics and nutrients
- Water use prioritization
  - Drinking water should be highest priority; no consensus after that
- Water sales to Texas
  - Most commenters are opposed
  - Those who favor water sales want compensation returned to the source region
- Planning process
  - Courts could rule on water sales before the plan is revised
  - Plan should look further into the future (e.g., 100 – 200 years) so the state doesn’t have “excess water” that could be sold
  - Plan should include regional provisions, where appropriate
Regional Differences

- **West**
  - Droughts (more impoundments; water transfers from the east)
  - Panhandle is ignored by the State, except at tax time

- **West and Central**
  - Groundwater contamination

- **Central and East**
  - Tribal issues more salient as one moves east
  - State and tribes should reach agreement on water rights

- **Urban – Rural**
  - OKC and Tulsa will control water in the State – leaving rural areas (the source of the State’s water supply) without adequate water to grow
  - Rural areas should be compensated if water is transferred to metropolitan areas
Not much so far on...

- Wetland protection
- Weather modification
- Water availability for firefighting
  - Other than rural water districts need bigger lines
- Consolidation of water regulatory agencies
- Navigation
- Culturally sensitive waters
- Public participation after plan is revised
- Conflict management strategies
Partners

- Thanks to our partners:
  - Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
  - Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils of Government
  - Oklahoma Municipal League
  - Oklahoma Rural Water Association
  - The many public and private organizations who help us advertise meetings and encourage participation
For more information, visit:
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