

# Haslam, TDEC Release Statewide Water Plan, Request Public Feedback - Press Release

Friday, December 07, 2018 | 02:03pm

Official Press Release, Friday, Dec. 7, 2018

Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam, along with Deputy Gov. Jim Henry and Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) Commissioner Dr. Shari Meghreblian, today released the statewide water availability plan developed by subject matter experts and led by a steering committee Haslam appointed earlier this year.

TDEC is now seeking feedback from the public on the plan that assesses current water resources and makes recommendations for steps that can be taken to ensure Tennessee has abundant water resources to support future population and economic growth through 2040.

"Tennessee is blessed with great sources of water today, but we should never take that for granted," Haslam said. "As our state grows, we must maintain our capacity to meet our water needs. That takes a plan, and I am grateful for the amount of work that has gone into this issue."

Recommendations from the plan include the following:

- Address current and impending infrastructure needs. A mechanism should be established to address unserved areas, infrastructure repair/replacement issues, and funding shortfalls faced by rural systems.
- Develop a comprehensive water resources planning process and planning cycle based on good science and information (consistent monitoring, data collection, modeling, trending, and reporting) that includes all major users and stakeholders.
- Develop a campaign to help the public and decision makers understand the value of water and natural resources and complexity in managing them.
- Encourage greater collaboration and communication concerning Tennessee's water resources.
- Evaluate existing laws to assess their implementation (e.g., Water Resources Act, Watershed District Act and Water Resources Information Act) and determine and enable proper jurisdictions for regional water planning and programs.
- Use the state water-resources task force or advisory committee and regional water-resources jurisdictions to facilitate intrastate and interstate regional cooperation.
- Identify sustainable funding for all TN H<sub>2</sub>O recommendations.

"This plan will help inform our future leaders – inside and outside of government – on important steps they can take to ensure our abundance of water," Deputy Governor Henry, who served as chairman of the steering committee, said. "This plan will need continuous and close attention to keep our economy and quality of life thriving for future generations."

TDEC, which helped organize the development of the plan, is now looking for feedback from the public. The feedback will supplement the report for future decision makers to evaluate as they consider the recommendations put forth by the steering committee and working groups.

"We want citizens to have the ability to comment on the report and have an opportunity to add to the discussion of how we move forward," said TDEC Commissioner Dr. Shari Meghreblian. "TN H<sub>2</sub>O is truly Tennessee's plan, developed by hundreds of citizens from diverse professional backgrounds across the state. Engaging the general public is the logical next step in the process."

Tennessee's population is estimated to double in the next 50 years. This growth, along with recent concerns over the utilization of the Memphis Sands Aquifer, droughts that have impacted numerous Tennessee communities, failures of aging drinking water and wastewater infrastructure and interstate battles over water rights, stressed the need to develop a statewide plan for addressing water availability.

In January 2018, Gov. Haslam announced the appointment of a steering committee of leaders from federal, state and local governments, industry, academia, environmental advocacy groups and public utilities to develop a statewide plan for future water availability in Tennessee. Subject matter experts in various fields were then assembled into working groups to study the current state of water resources.

Working group members interpreted and assessed a wide array of data and information sources using various models and assumptions under a limited time schedule. The resources studied include surface water, groundwater, and natural aquatic systems; related topics included water and wastewater infrastructure, water law and recreation. From that, the volunteer teams synthesized, analyzed and identified gaps in available data and information to arrive at recommendations for key focus areas for achieving and maintaining water availability in the future.

The plan is available for viewing and commenting at [tn.gov/environment/tnh2o](http://tn.gov/environment/tnh2o) through February 28, 2019.