

Initiative Protects State's Water Supply - Roane County News

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By Hugh Willett

Tennessee has lots of water but it needs a plan to ensure that water is managed properly, according to state and Roane County officials who met in Kingston Friday to discuss such a plan.

"We think the best way to protect Tennessee water is to plan," said Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation Commissioner Shari Meghreblian.

The plan is called TN H2O.

The initiative was launched in December 2017 and will include an assessment of current water resources, including surface and groundwater infrastructure and natural resources.

When the first draft of the plan is presented to Gov. Bill Haslam in October, its recommendations will include institutional and legal framework to help ensure Tennessee has an abundance of water resources to support future population and economic growth.

State Sen. Ken Yager said that water has been a key element in the history of the development of the state and Roane County.

Deputy Governor Jim Henry said the management of water resources is important to long-term growth and industrial recruitment.

"As far as jobs go, water is important," Henry said.

Despite the fact that Tennessee generally has a lot of water, there are places, particularly in the southern part of Middle Tennessee, where residents are experiencing water shortages.

"We take water for granted here in Tennessee," said state Rep. Kent Calfee, who described challenges he's faced providing water to cattle on his farm in Roane County.

County Executive Ron Woody said that part of the planning process should involve taking care of water resources.

"We have an abundance of water but we have to keep it clean," he said.

Harriman City Councilman Buddy Holley said he would like the plan to address ways of controlling runoff from steep slopes into the Emory River.

"We have problems with turbidity," he said.

A key issue under study involves water rights. Across the country and even within the state, water rights are being challenged, Meghreblian said.

Georgia has attempted to claim water from the Tennessee River. Mississippi has claimed water from the Memphis Aquifer, she said.

Kingston City Manager David Bolling suggested the plan include study of how local utilities can work together during water shortages.

He said that when he was Oliver Springs town manager he worked with nearby utilities to access water for the town.