



Illinois Water Resources Center

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Illinois Water Conference Inspects Water Supply Planning, Promotes Conservation

At last year's Illinois Water Conference—held on October 8th and 9th in Champaign—speakers examined and discussed the challenges presented by long-term water supply planning.

“There is great uncertainty in the future,” Gary Clark, director of the Office of Water Resources at the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), said of water supply planning, “It requires consideration of uncertainties in climate, geology, hydrology and a host of social and economic factors.”

Using three water demand scenarios for Illinois over the next 50 years—constructed by Ben Dziegielewski from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale—the Illinois State Water Survey (ISWS) is examining the ability of resources to meet those demands and the impacts of those demands on the environment.

According to ISWS, the scenarios—less resource intensive, the current trend, and more resource intensive—are meant to “provide estimates of how much more or less water will be available on the surface and in aquifers, and how much more or less water will be needed by consumers if climate changes by specified amounts.”

“Uncertainty creates a dilemma for planners, because there

are costs and harm caused by either over-estimating or under-estimating the effects of drought or climate change on water supplies,” said Richard Sparks, director of research at National Great Rivers Research and Education Center, and keynote speaker at the conference.

Clark noted that future temperatures will most likely increase due to climate change, causing water demand to increase and water availability to decrease. However, he said it is unclear whether climate conditions will become wetter or drier.

“Droughts are the issue,” Clark said. “They have caused the most problems in the past and will cause the most in the future.”

According to research from the ISWS, Illinois has not experienced a major multi-year drought in the last 40 years. However, Allen Wehrmann, head of the Center for Groundwater Science at ISWS, stressed the importance of planning for them anyway.

“It's not a matter of if,” Wehrmann said of droughts. “It's a matter of when.”

Conference speakers focused primarily on the regional planning efforts resulting from former Governor Rod Blagojevich's 2006 Executive Order, which initiated a three-year water supply planning

process for Illinois.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), commissioned by IDNR to carry out regional planning for an 11-county area in northeastern Illinois (one of two pilot-planning areas in Illinois) is trying to mitigate water supply concerns through water conservation.

In a recent regional water demand study, CMAP found that without planning intervention, demand in their 11-county region could increase by 64 percent by 2050. Tim Loftus, CMAP senior planner for water resources, pointed to wastefulness as the issue rather than scarcity.

Conservation, according to Loftus, is the most logical and ethical first response.

“If we can become more conservative with the use of a resource and increase efficiency, why wouldn’t we?” Loftus said. He noted that conservation must be economically favorable to be looked at as a primary option.

“This is an early-phase planning effort that has been undertaken within a relatively short period of time,” Loftus said. “As regional planning matures, we will explore all options more fully than time and resources will allow us to right now. In the meantime, conservation has proven elsewhere to be a

cost effective and efficacious means for managing demand.”

Loftus presented 14 conservation measures—including improved plumbing efficiency, public information and school education—that they plan to adopt through regional planning.

CMAP’s progress was deterred recently when former Gov. Blagojevich cut funding for the final year of his three-year initiative in an effort to close a \$2 billion gap in FY 2009 budget. As a result, CMAP has had to scale back staff resources and other project components.

Mark your calendar!

Illinois Water 2010 will be held on October 5-7 at the Hilton Garden Inn, Champaign, Illinois. The conference will focus on water sustainability in Illinois -- from best management practices to information gaps; from modeling and monitoring to local community action.

Watch your email for our call for papers and sessions.

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