

Arkansas Water Plan: Governor Sanders' Executive Order Requesting Comprehensive Analysis/Update



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Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders issued an Executive Order (“EO”) requesting that the Arkansas Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Division (“NRD”) undertake:

- A comprehensive analysis/report of the State’s water needs
- Update the Arkansas Water Plan (“AWP”)

See EO 23-27.

The NRD is governed by a Commission that establishes policy and makes funding and regulatory decisions relative to:

- Soil conservation
- Nutrient management
- Water rights
- Dam safety
- Water resources planning and development

The Arkansas General Assembly (“AGA”) delegated responsibility for state water resources planning to the predecessor organization to NRD – the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission in 1969. Further, the AGA provided the Soil and Water Commission the statutory authority to develop the first AWP in 1975.

The AWP has been described as the State’s policy for long-term water management. It was updated in 1990 and 2014.

The NRD has described the purpose of the AWP as bringing:

... data, science, and public input together to define water demands, water supplies, issues, and potential solutions to meet our future needs.

EO 23-27 recognizes the role of both the NRD and the AWP in the State of Arkansas’s water resources. It further notes that the AWP has not been updated for almost 10 years and that there is:

... urgent need to update the Plan in order to meet the changing needs of communities, large and small – across the State.

Noted concerns/needs include:

- Impact of aging infrastructure and population change impacting drinking water, stormwater, sanitation capabilities, etc.

- Need to investigate possible solutions to reduce groundwater depletion and provide a sustainable source of water for household, agricultural, industrial uses
- State's susceptibility to frequent floods and dependence on flood mitigation programs and components such as dams, levees, and drainage improvements for protection
- Need for a comprehensive strategy (including an updated AWP) to address the previously referenced issues

The tasks to be undertaken in updating the AWP include:

- Model and assess water availability (including significant changes from the 2014 AWP)
- Evaluate, develop, and recommend water management strategies for all water-use sectors and develop innovative funding mechanisms to support their implementation
- Undertake statewide engagement to identify the most pressing current issues and develop practical solutions in collaboration with all representatives from all water-use sectors

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Secretary and Director of NRD are requested to update the AWP in two phases.

The EO describes the two phases as including:

- Phase I to be completed within 365 days of the EO and determine areas of significant change to be reevaluated or updated including:

... a review of the visions, goals, and objectives of the Plan, the policy recommendations, and a review of the available water-use demands and projections.

- Phase II to be provided to the Governor by December 31, 2024, and the activities will be based on a final programmatic workplan, schedule, and anticipated costs developed under Phase I. Needed updates to reflect:
 - Current demands
 - Forecasts
 - Supplies
 - Availability
 - Quality of surface and groundwater
 - Resilience assessment
 - Regional and basin-level water management strategies
 - Local project and program assessments
 - Focus basins identification and solutions
 - Structural analysis of flood mitigation infrastructure and proposed solutions
 - Comprehensive analysis of water management policies

A copy of the EO can be downloaded [here](#).