



Interstate Water Solutions: Lessons from the Past and Recommendations for the Future — A Look toward 2050

Our cities, counties, states, tribes and federal agencies depend increasingly on interstate and watershed organizations as coordinating bodies for watershed-based planning and development initiatives to manage water supply, flood protection, water quality controls, fisheries management, recreational areas and other interdependent priorities.

In response to our increasing reliance on interstate water organizations, the Interstate Council on Water Policy (ICWP) undertook a study in 2006 of the various interstate water management patterns and practices across the US as the foundation for recommendations intended to amplify the effectiveness of these organizations in the future of water resource management. The study included case studies, findings, and recommendations intended to help existing agencies and organizations enhance their effectiveness in meeting 21st century water management challenges.

Interstate Water Solutions: Lessons from the Past and Recommendations for the Future A Look toward 2050 reintroduces and refreshes the findings of the 2006 study. It ensures the relevance of previous research and captures additional lessons learned, changes in the federal landscape, and new examples of watershed management arrangements operating in today's world. Notable additions include:

- A “Current Era” of the evolution of watershed management reflects trends toward more “bottom up” initiatives; less regulatory emphasis and stronger

partnership-oriented, voluntary compliance; less federal funds and greater reliance on creative funding mechanisms; stronger emphasis on multiple objectives; and a stronger role for non-governmental stakeholders in policy decisions.

- Emerging factors are transforming how state and interstate organizations conduct business and manage water resources. Challenges include:
 - the rise of anti-regulation and state sovereignty sentiments that can lead to viewing interstate organizations as threatening or redundant with state and federal agencies;
 - funding cuts to federal agencies that provide critical data collection and forecasts upon which interstate water management agencies rely; and
 - uncertainty around how climate change is impacting the effectiveness of existing strategies and posing new, complex management challenges.
- Opportunities include:
 - the expansion of data technologies that offer enhancements to our monitoring and predictive capabilities;
 - the growing recognition of eco-system services and water demands for instream flows, estuary health, and endangered species recovery as part of interstate water management solutions; and
 - the return by Congress to a pattern of adopting incremental changes to its Water Resources Development Act every two years.



Water diversion dam on the South Platte River in northern Colorado below Denver.

- An examination of more recent past experiences has taught us that:
 - The legal framework of water law — riparian, prior appropriation, and hybrid states — influences the powers and roles of interstate water resource management agencies.
 - There is a need for interstate organizations to guard against member parochialism and bureaucratic fatigue by acting proactively to affirm their purpose and the benefits the members jurisdictions derive from their activities.
 - Ongoing advocacy is needed to maintain reasonable financial support from signatory parties. Justifications for sufficient annual appropriations are most compelling when they speak to specific benefits member jurisdictions receive, align with priorities of the jurisdictions, and offer convincing consequences of insufficient funding.
- New case studies highlighted in this report illustrate the growing emphasis on interstate solutions to species recovery, drought contingency planning in the western states and flood mitigation planning in the eastern states, water quality improvements in rivers, lakes and estuaries, and water supply management in times of low flows.

The ICWP is ideally positioned to move the practice of water resource planning, policy and management from the present toward 2050. Central to its mission is its role as a catalyst in the reformulation of national water policy and as a leader in integrating diverse interests to promote comprehensive approaches to policy making at the state, interstate and federal levels.

The following recommendations, which update and condense the original findings and recommendations found in the 2006 report, anticipate development of an action agenda to improve water resource policy and management processes by the ICWP in partnership with federal officials and association leaders.

Recommendation 1: ICWP should work with interstate organizations to highlight, promote and nourish regional approaches and effective organizations.

Better information is needed to publicize the specific contributions that interstate organizations are making to more efficient and effective water resource management decisions on a regional basis. Work is needed to encourage increased state and federal support for and reliance upon interstate agencies and to cultivate program flexibility to allow for adaptation of interstate organization accomplishments and recommendations.

Recommendation 2: Foster integration of interstate water management needs and programs with federal initiatives and policies.

Interstate water organizations should encourage federal programs, initiatives, and policies to be implemented in a manner that recognizes the distinct challenges on interstate waters and the need for interstate collaboration, capitalizing on existing interstate organizations to the greatest extent possible. Federal participation in interstate organizations should be directed, in part, at addressing barriers that have historically impeded integrated water resource management. All should collaborate on addressing fragmented authorities, inconsistent standards, and unreliable data and funding.

Recommendation 3: Work with interstate water organizations and key stakeholders to evaluate management initiatives, enhance education and engage in strategic planning.

Regular education and strategic planning will help ensure engagement and confidence in interstate organizations as large-scale resource management initiatives emerge. Both stakeholders and federal agencies should maintain an awareness of organizations’ responsibilities, limitations and relation to other resource management agencies in their watersheds.

The Interstate Council on Water Policy is a national organization that provides regional, state, and local water resources agencies a voice in helping to shape today’s key water management policies and how they impact real-world issues. ICWP members share expertise and create solutions for the challenges we all face. Through relationships with key federal agency staff, as well as our annual meetings and conferences, our members directly contribute to development and execution of our nation’s water policies and legislation.

Today’s strategic priority issues include national water policy development, integrated water planning for sustainable resource development and management, and vital water data and water science tools to inform policy and planning. For more information, visit www.icwp.org.