

## Musing about the PA State Water Planning Act

Act 220 of 2002 rightly focused statewide attention on our water resources, and authorizes updates every five (5) years. The process followed from 2003-2008 was general and inclusive, and the Water Atlas and the reports were thoughtful and comprehensive. Individuals and organizations with both regional and statewide knowledge and interests invested time and treasure in what was really the first look at the larger water resource issues since passage of major guidance such as the federal Clean Water Act, Floodplain Management Act (Act 166) and the Stormwater Management Act (Act 167). In other words, it was the first State Water Plan of the modern era.

It would be a mistake to repeat the process like the first time around (2002-2008) because the focus was so broad and inclusive that the products were necessarily generalized. From here on out, each subsequent five-year update needs a tighter focus – i.e. - a single aspect that involves all the same players - and we probably should define the next two or three cycles right now. The first focused cycle (from 2013-2018) undoubtedly needs to concentrate on the *creation and integration of our water database and mapping*.

The benefits of that approach are myriad:

1. It directly addresses Section 3117 of Act 220 (titled "Statewide Data System") which states that "the Department shall establish and maintain a statewide system to gather, process, and distribute information on the availability, distribution, quality, and use of water resources of this Commonwealth."\*
2. It directly addresses the portion of Act 220 (Section 3104 (2)) that authorizes "cooperative agreements for... coordinated collection and maintenance of data regarding water resources...", and every entity involved in the 2008 version has some information or data to contribute.
3. It would set a precedent for continual thought of our water future at a time scale sensitive to the value and nature of the water resource in PA.
4. Development of a singular database that all surface water can connect through is the basis for all future modeling and analysis; the technologies of today both allow and require that approach.
5. As we define the data model we will find places to consolidate programs; the restructuring of the water-related programs within DEP is actually a first step.

This task will be complex enough to occupy the entire five year cycle from now until 2018. The need for a singular data model may even be one of the reasons that we have not begun this new cycle until the end of the time frame allowed. This is also the time to re-connect the man-made and natural surface water infrastructure – stormwater works are not so different from natural channels as to warrant separation and they all flow together!

Ideas for the subsequent five-year periods might include:

2018 – 2023	Unified Flood Mitigation
2023 – 2028	Water Supply for the Next Century
2028 – 2033	Groundwater Integration

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\*The timing of the economic downturn in late 2008 and then the change of Administration in 2010 logically distracted from DEP 's implementation of a statewide data system, which oversight can now be rectified.