



Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities

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Bennett L. Bearden, J.D., LL.M., J.S.D.  
Special Counsel on Water Law and Policy Office of the State Geologist  
Geological Survey of Alabama  
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Dear Dr. Bearden,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the recent report by the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group, *Water Management Issues in Alabama*. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) provides educational opportunities to help improve people and communities' quality of life and economic well being with information grounded in science. Water touches all six of the ACES program areas: agriculture, economic and community development, urban affairs and new nontraditional programs, family and consumer sciences, 4-H and youth development, and forestry, wildlife, and natural resources.

The ACES strongly supports the development and implementation of a statewide comprehensive water management plan that acknowledges the importance of sustaining safe, abundant drinking water, economic opportunities, and environmental stewardship. The comments below are summarized from the input of several ACES specialists with specific interests in water.

Specific comments on the Water Management Issues in Alabama report include:

- Provide a better explanation of the regulated riparian legal structure. The recommendation to move toward this legal structure is made several times, but a full description of what is included in the regulated riparian legal structure and why it is a better fit for Alabama is not included in the report.
- Consider convening a 'Water Policy Summit' that invites representatives from other states to share what they consider a success for their current water policy, discussion of lessons learned, and chart a course for future water planning and policy in Alabama. Potential states to invite include Florida, North Carolina, Nebraska, Georgia, and Oklahoma. The ACES could assist with this initiative.
- In regards to economic development, continued emphasis on the importance of agriculture and water availability in job creation and positive economic impacts.
- Drought planning considerations could include recycling of water or water re-use for new construction.

- Rainwater harvesting and rainwater collection should remain a private property right.
- Maintenance of the hydrologic cycle (infiltration of rainwater, stormwater runoff controls) across land uses is integral to surface and groundwater protection.
- Science should inform the development of water policy. Relying on current knowledge and identifying data needs will be critical in ensuring appropriate recommendations for future water use.
- Water quantity and quality are inseparable and should be considered together throughout planning and policy development.
- Page 25, Environmental re-use - Consider including floodplain enhancement through the restoration of stream and floodplain connectivity.
- Include the American Rainwater Catchment System Association (ARCSA) on the non-government organization committee list.
- Include Alabama A&M University Water Management Team on the committee list.
- Include the Alabama Cooperative Extension System-Urban Affairs Unit on the committee list.

Since our mission is to serve the people of Alabama through providing unbiased, research based information, the ACES could offer assistance in stakeholder engagement and public education of multiple audiences. The ACES has offices in every county of the state that are staffed with Extension professionals who interact with and understand their local clientele. This is a powerful opportunity to request stakeholder involvement of a myriad of audiences and provide educational materials that will have meaningful impacts and outcomes. Stakeholder involvement should be coordinated, local, and inclusive.

The ACES provides public education and technical assistance to stakeholder groups to protect, maintain, and restore the health and integrity of Alabama waters. County, regional, and state Extension personnel offer programs that address priority concerns such as nonpoint source pollution, irrigation, and drought/water conservation. Several successful programs that are supported fully or as a partnership of the ACES are described below including:

- Alabama Agriculture Irrigation Information Network - develop agricultural irrigation water resources in a responsible manner from off-stream storage from high winter flows, upland storage of rainfall runoff, deep wells, and surface/ ground water combinations, and promote wise and effective irrigation water management ([www.aces.edu/anr/irrigation/](http://www.aces.edu/anr/irrigation/)).
- **Alabama Education in aquatic sciences, Aquaculture, Recreational fisheries and Natural resource conservation (ALEARN)** provides aquaculture producers, students, anglers, teachers and other citizen groups with information to help them conserve, enjoy, and gain economic benefit from Alabama's rich aquatic resources ([www.aces.edu/dept/fisheries/index.php](http://www.aces.edu/dept/fisheries/index.php)).
- Alabama Water Watch – A 20-year old successful citizen water monitoring program with protocols approved by the US Environmental Protection Agency to collect chemical and bacteriological data in Alabama's streams, rivers, reservoirs, and bays ([www.alabamawaterwatch.org](http://www.alabamawaterwatch.org)).

- Alabama Smart Yards – A program that introduces environmental consciousness and practical management options for yards and neighborhoods to homeowners ([www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-1359/ANR-1359.pdf](http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-1359/ANR-1359.pdf)).
- Water Wheels – Statewide mobile water conservation education trailer housed at Alabama A&M University that provides information on water recycling and basic Alabama water facts using computer 3-D learning environments and other educational materials (<http://www.aces.edu/natural-resources/water-resources/education-outreach/water-wheels/index.php>).
- Alabama Watershed Restoration Program – An interdisciplinary program that utilizes expertise in engineering, ecology, planning, and construction to provide watershed planning, recommendations on stormwater control measures, and stream enhancement / restoration ([www.aces.edu/forestry-nature/water-resources/](http://www.aces.edu/forestry-nature/water-resources/)).

The ACES serves as a liaison to translate research needs that are on the horizon to scientists based at Auburn University and Alabama A&M University. This communication of current and future needs means that ACES is always asking questions and listening to the citizens of Alabama to identify the role we can play in improving quality of life, quality of natural resources, and improved economic opportunities.

We are honored to provide input on the *Water Management Issues in Alabama* report and hope that our strong history of public engagement and education will be utilized to share the need for science-based water planning and management.

Sincerely,



Eve Brantley, PhD  
Alabama Cooperative Extension System  
State Water Resources Specialist