

From: Mark Kolinski [mailto:canyonman@wildsouth.org]
Sent: Wednesday, November 28, 2012 11:57 AM
To: Cook, Stan
Subject: comments on AWAAG report

Dear Mr. Cook,

This letter is sent with the purpose of submitting a couple of comments on the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group's August 1, 2012 report to Governor Bentley on Water Management Issues in Alabama.

I fully appreciate the challenge of crafting a comprehensive state-wide management policy for an issue as far-reaching as water use in the state of Alabama. One needs only to look at the list of stakeholders to understand the complexity and scope of such an undertaking. How our water resources are utilized and managed affects every citizen and business entity in the state.

I think that this report identifying the key issues in crafting a comprehensive water management policy is a good start. Given the immensity of the undertaking, the timeline set forth for implementing a policy is highly unrealistic. Just collecting, compiling and presenting the most current data of water use across the state, putting together a comprehensive picture of currently available water resources and their geographical distribution, and researching all the latest science pertinent to environmental stream flows in our geographic area could easily take the next year. However, all three of these are essential information forming the basis of all discussions and decision making leading to the formation of a wise and comprehensive state-wide water policy.

I have two comments to make regarding the process which the agencies are undertaking:

- Setting priorities for water use will be an integral part of the discussion in the face of so many competing uses. I feel that it is absolutely essential to the process that the ecological importance of water to Alabama's incredibly diverse natural environments be recognized as the foundation of all water policy, since healthy and sustainable ecosystems and all the important services they provide underlie the health of our state's economy and all of its citizens and communities. Using the best available science to determine environmental flows necessary for maintaining the health of Alabama's diverse ecosystems should be at the top of the agenda. Current law in Alabama has neglected this aspect of water management, focusing instead on competing human uses of this finite resource and their effect on human populations, as if this can be considered independently from ecosystem health.
- Broad stakeholder support for any water policy is essential to its development and success. Everyone needs to be included in the process and feel that their concerns are being addressed in order to achieve consensus and to keep the process from being mired in conflicts and litigation. This will necessitate numerous public meetings across the state through which all stakeholders, large and small, can meet face-to-face to discuss the issues and promote understanding among all the

competing uses as the policy is being developed and decisions are made. I understand the challenge in achieving this, given that water use affects all of us in so many different ways. I can see the process of developing a comprehensive water policy in this manner taking anywhere from 2-5 years. The complexity of the issues and the interactions among ecological and human needs of this essential resource will require an extensive commitment of time and resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Good luck!

Mark

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“Whether we and our politicians know it or not, Nature is party to all our deals and decisions, and she has more votes, a longer memory, and a sterner sense of justice than we do.”

~Wendell Berry