



November 29, 2018

Indiana Legislative Council
Water Infrastructure Task Force
Edmond Soliday and Susan Glick, Co-chairs
Via Electronic Mail

RE: Memo Regarding Regionalization of
Indiana's Water Infrastructure

Dear Congressman Soliday and Senator Glick:

The [Indiana Water Monitoring Council \(InWMC\)](#)ⁱ is one of Indiana's leading organizations working to ensure sustainable water resources to improve the ability to address the full scope of Indiana's water resource issues now and in the future. Since 2009, the InWMC has worked to promote water monitoring and data sharing to support better decision-making when it comes to Indiana's water resources. Our council represents a diverse group of stakeholders in Indiana's broad water resources community, including government (local, state, federal), universities, consultants, and other professionals and volunteers dedicated to communication, coordination, and sharing of monitoring information to support the stewardship of Indiana waters.

Background

Recognizing the importance of our water infrastructure and the pressing problems that led to the creation of the Water Infrastructure Task Force, the InWMC offers the significant combined expertise of our members to help inform the discussion of Task 4 of your statutory directive IC-2-5-44 (4) – to evaluate whether regionalization of Indiana's water infrastructure might improve system performance and ratepayer value.

We believe regionalization is important. In its 2016 report, [Financial Needs for Water and Wastewater Infrastructure in Indiana \(2015-2034\)](#)ⁱⁱ, the Indiana Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations estimated that to rehabilitate or improve Indiana's water and wastewater infrastructure to meet current service and regulatory requirements will cost Indiana taxpayers \$15.6-\$17.5 billion in the next 15-16 years. Given these costs, the InWMC believes regional water planning is indeed critical to understanding the many factors at the local and regional level that will impact the potential success of any solutions proposed and fully supports the Task Force's effort in this regard.

More importantly, the InWMC believes that the factors considered in the delineation of water planning regions must be informed by watershed boundaries. Many of the underlying issues stressing our infrastructure are watershed-based issues. We strongly believe that any regionalization for the purposes of water infrastructure planning that fails to consider watersheds will significantly undermine the success of solutions proposed and could have serious unforeseen consequences.

The flow of surface water follows the lay of the land, not our cultural, social, economic, and political boundaries. Given this fact, there is simply no way to decouple watersheds with the many issues we currently face with our water infrastructure. A regionalization informed by watersheds will help Indiana:

- Ensure that water of suitable quality and quantity is available for use when and where needed.
- Manage the quantity and quality of both surface and ground water in an integrated manner to protect, maintain, and enhance the overall resource.
- Allocate surface and ground water to ensure long term availability of the resource.
- Better manage water shortages so that all users share the burden.
- Plan for and manage inter-basin water transfers in a way that reflects the variability in water availability, respects natural systems, and protects the source basin's present and future water demands.
- Equitably allocate surface and ground water supplies, including inter basin transfers
- Better protect and plan for hydrologic extremes (floods and droughts).
- Incorporate ecological flows into management and planning for the protection of our aquatic resources.

Consequences of ignoring watersheds

Any regionalization that ignores watersheds will be inefficient, create more problems than it solves, and make resolving existing and future issues more difficult. There are examples in Indiana that illustrate these potential problems. They are part of larger and ongoing water quantity and/or water quality issues that would be exacerbated by a regionalization that ignores watersheds. To do so in these cases would divide instead of unite all the key players involved in the issues:

- **Western Lake Erie Basin** – The Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) in Lake Erie near Toledo has led to an increased importance for monitoring and reducing the transport of nutrients to Lake Erie. There are multiple governmental and non-governmental entities working together to ensure we have enough water monitoring at key locations. This means working across state lines (Indiana and Ohio) and using as many diverse funding sources to ensure we can meet the imposed 40% reduction in nutrients. Understanding water quantity and water quality in the St. Mary's and St. Joseph River (Lake Erie) watersheds is critical to understanding what is happening in Lake Erie.
 - **Ohio River** – The Ohio River is another water body that has had HABs issues and is one of the bigger contributors to the Gulf of Mexico hypoxia problem. The Ohio River is also a major source of drinking water for several Indiana communities. Applying a watershed approach is key to the effective management of the infrastructure that relies on this shared resource because it requires involvement of multiple cities, counties, and states that use or drain into the Ohio River.
 - **North Central Indiana** – Following the drought in 2012 there has been a significant increase in agricultural irrigation from groundwater and surface water, particularly in North Central Indiana. Many farmers have installed their own groundwater monitoring wells or have paid a consultant to monitor their ground water levels to ensure they do not impact their neighbors by withdrawing too much. Currently, there are plans in Northwest
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Ohio to begin using groundwater, which could negatively impact Indiana citizens if shared aquifers and the watershed areas that provide for their recharge are not taken into consideration.

Regionalization that is not informed by watershed boundaries runs the risk of separating water supply and demand. To create planning regions separated by county or other political boundaries would divide many of our urban communities from the upstream watershed sources upon which their water supply relies. To do so would create barriers to effective management of the source waters.

How would watersheds assist with infrastructure planning and management?

To underscore the importance of watershed-based planning, we would point out that many existing programs already use watersheds in their funding and research frameworks. The following examples are just a few of the programs that together provide future infrastructure planning a strong foundation upon which to build effective and sustainable solutions:

- Indiana Department of Environmental Management's Water Quality Monitoring Strategy
 - The U.S. EPA's Clean Water Act Sections 319 and 205(j) Grant Programs, which funnel approximately \$2.75 million into Indiana for locally-led watershed planning and restoration each year.
 - River Basin Commissions as enacted by IC 14-30, which includes commissions for the Kankakee, Maumee, St. Joseph (Lake Michigan), and Upper Wabash Rivers.
 - Indiana's Lake and River Enhancement Program (LARE) administered through the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), which provides state funds to protect and enhance aquatic habitat for fish and wildlife and to ensure the continued viability of Indiana's publicly accessible lakes and streams for multiple uses.
 - The U.S. Geological Survey's Next Generation Water Monitoring Program
 - The National Groundwater Monitoring Network (NGWMN), which provides access to groundwater data for selected groundwater monitoring wells from federal, state, and local groundwater monitoring networks across the nation.
 - Indiana Association of Floodplain and Stormwater Managers (INAFSM) advocating for responsible floodplain and stormwater management for the well-being of the public trust.
 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service, which is responsible for administering federal Farm Bill cost share programs to protect water quality.
 - The Indiana Conservation Partnership, working to support economically and environmentally compatible land and water stewardship decisions, practices and technologies.
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In addition to the programs noted above, almost all the water planning and monitoring that has occurred in Indiana to date has been informed by watersheds. These include locally led efforts, statewide planning, and interstate planning efforts such as:

- Stormwater management plans developed by MS4 communities
- More than 100 locally developed watershed management plans throughout the state
- The Domestic Action Plan for Lake Erie under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement
- Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
- Indiana's State Nutrient Reduction Strategy
- Community natural hazard mitigation and emergency response plans

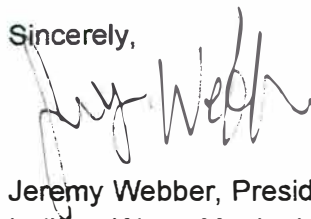
Like the InWMC – and hopefully, now the Water Infrastructure Task Force – these organizations and efforts recognize the fact that watersheds are an integral component of the many different issues they attempt to address.

In conclusion, we believe the specific recommendations of your Task Force should reflect the importance of watersheds in developing a statewide water plan should the Task Force be reconvened in 2019. The factors to be included in the recommended feasibility study are all affected by watersheds, including the land uses, the people, and infrastructure management to name a few.

The InWMC recognizes that there may be social, cultural, and regional issues in some areas of the state that make effective collaboration on water infrastructure difficult. However, these issues will continue to exist and very likely be exacerbated with any regionalization defined solely by political, social or economic boundaries. Watershed boundaries provide a starting point for transcending such issues because they are based on the reality that these resources are shared by all. Considering watersheds in regionalization will also allow easier accessibility to outside funding sources that could augment the State efforts on many of the infrastructure needs.

Only when watersheds are recognized as a key factor in water infrastructure planning will Indiana communities be able to effectively and fully address their water infrastructure issues and the watershed-based problems stressing them.

Sincerely,



Jeremy Webber, President
Indiana Water Monitoring Council

ⁱ <https://www.inwmc.net/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.in.gov/ifa/files/2016%20Financial%20Needs%20for%20Water%20and%20WW%20Infrastructure%20Report.pdf> (Accessed on November 20, 2018)