

WATER USE IN UTAH 2009

History

The League of Women Voters undertook a study of the waters of Utah in 2009. Members were concerned about the state's water future in view of the high probability of water scarcity and population growth. We believe that current per capita water use is unsustainable but also believe it is unnecessary and even extravagant. We believe people can and will change their ways with education, careful planning, and wise laws. Our member support both behavioral and technological changes as ways to reduce water use and protect the environment. We also wish to be strong advocates in all levels of government for the environment for its own sake and because it is essential to our wellbeing. In 2009 the League questions the state's reliance on the concept of water as private property as it did in the League water study of 1981. We recommend a rethinking of this historic water law. We find this and other of the 1981 study are as relevant today as they were then. As in 1981, all interested parties in Utah must revisit and revise existing water laws and institutions in order to create a system that will work for the future

The League's position with respect to water use –

Utah water policies should be structured to address human needs while protecting the integrity of water tables, lakes, streams, wetlands and their attendant wildlife. Instream flows and conservation pools should be established for the state's natural waters.

Environmental safeguards must recognize the interrelationships among water, air, land resources and wildlife.

Stringent controls must ensure protection of surface supplies and recharge areas for principal aquifers and the overall integrity of the surface and ground water in our water basins.

The public must understand the limits of our water resources and the costs to the environment and the economy of our current and projected water use.

Water conservation should preferentially result in enhancement of the natural environment rather than be directed only to growth and economic development. Sustainable economic development should be conditioned on the availability of water for projected use.

Advice to the Board

Additional Studies

1. Aquifers,
2. The water - energy connection
2. Contamination of water by pharmaceuticals, incomplete sewage treatment, farm run-off, etc.
3. Sustainability in Utah

Direction to the board from Leagues other than Salt Lake

1. Utah League should oppose St. George pipeline, Green River nuclear power plant, water for oil shale development, Las Vegas water grab (from Salt Lake).
2. Utah League should support broadening state laws on watershed integrity and quantity of available water.
3. Support further scientific studies of watersheds. Example: USGS study of Spanish Valley.

Relevant section of 1982 water position

Water Conservancy District Boards should be made more representative of the public they serve by use of criteria and guidelines for appointment, by direct election of members and/or by limiting the number of terms members may serve.

The League believes that the state should maintain a current survey of all water resources, ground and surface, and a current adjudication of water rights. We support adequate state funding to implement these functions.

The state of Utah should establish a policy for water rights conversions; this policy should incorporate land use considerations.

The League supports changes in Utah water law to (1) permit "public interest" to take precedence over "first in time" as criteria for granting any remaining unappropriated water rights, (2) permit appropriation of water rights for a defined time period, and (3) include "instream flows" as a water right.

The Utah Legislature should periodically establish a definition of "public interest". State and local government should encourage, and when necessary require, water conservation. Public education programs are a necessary first step towards conservation.