

Water Management Planning in Louisiana

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Abstract

A combination of factors (e.g., drought, falling water levels in major aquifers, increased competition for ground-water resources, and indicators of the encroachment of saline water into freshwater aquifers) combined over the last few years to convince citizens of Louisiana that policies should be promulgated to ensure the orderly development and management of the state's ground-water resources. In the 2001 Regular Legislative Session, Louisiana's senators and representatives passed Act 446 (Senate Bill 965), which establishes the Louisiana Ground Water Management Commission (Commission)—an appointive body charged with the responsibility of developing a comprehensive water management plan. Act 446 directs the Commission to “develop and promulgate rules for actions which shall be taken to preserve and manage the ground water” in areas for which conditions can be determined to be “critical.” A “critical ground water area” is defined as “an area where sustainability of an aquifer is not being maintained under current or projected usage or under normal environmental conditions which are causing a serious adverse impact to an aquifer.” This paper describes the factors that led to the passage of the act. It also provides a concise explanation of what the act is designed to accomplish, and surveys the mix of technical, economic, and legal issues associated with water planning in Louisiana. Also included is a brief comparison of Louisiana's approach to the management of ground-water resources with programs of the states of Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Florida.