



LOUISIANA WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN 2026

Summary of Critical Issues and Recommendations by Louisiana Wildlife Federation

1. Historical Context and Current Framework

- Louisiana has historically relied on a patchwork of laws and regulations for water management, with no comprehensive statewide water code.
- The 2025 Water Resources Management Act granted broad authority to the Department of Conservation and Energy (C&E) to establish a comprehensive water resource management program, but implementation remains incomplete.
- A formal water code is being developed by the Louisiana State Law Institute Water Code Committee, but final legislative consideration is unlikely before 2028.
- Since 1951, groundwater depletion rates have increased 578.7% across the Gulf Coastal Plain Regional Aquifer System, which includes Louisiana.
- Louisiana has spent over \$5 million studying water resources since 1956 but has yet to adopt a comprehensive statewide plan.

2. Legislative and Regulatory Framework and Gaps

- Louisiana lacks a comprehensive and consistent water resource monitoring network. Current data collection is fragmented and not easily accessible to the public.
- Improved data tools and modeling are needed to forecast water use and identify future supply gaps.
- C&E has authority to restrict groundwater withdrawals in designated areas of concern but lacks similar authority for surface water withdrawals, which remain under a voluntary program.
- Agricultural water use, including irrigation and livestock, is exempt from regulatory or administrative oversight.
- Statutory priority hierarchy exists for water use, with human consumption and public health as the highest priority, followed by agricultural, irrigation, and industrial/mining, but enforcement mechanisms are lacking.

3. Critical Issues

Water Supply

- ~61% of Louisiana's population relies on groundwater as primary drinking supply, but high salinity and contamination render much groundwater unsuitable.
- 13 aquifers comprise the state's groundwater resources; the three largest (Sparta, Chicot, Southern Hills) supply Shreveport, Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Lafayette, and Lake Charles.
- Groundwater and surface water are hydrologically connected, yet Louisiana law treats them as separate resources — a significant management gap.

Water Use by Sector (2015 data)

- Power generation: 48.9% of total withdrawals (99% from surface water).
- Industry: 24.7% (88% from surface water).
- Irrigation: 12.1% (68% from groundwater).
- Power generation + industry combined account for ~73% of all state water withdrawals.

Emerging Threats

- Data centers and industrial manufacturing hubs (Meta in Richland Parish, Hyundai steel mill in Ascension Parish, 7–15 additional data centers under discussion) represent a significant new demand.
- Hyperscale data centers consumed 66 billion liters of water nationally in 2023, projected 60–124 billion liters by 2028, and developers routinely classify water use as proprietary information.
- Additional threats: saltwater encroachment, drought-driven level decline, and over-pumping.
- Governor Landry's Project Lightning Speed (accelerated infrastructure development) heightens concern that regulatory approvals granted prior to C&E's adoption of a comprehensive water management program will not account for or manage water use, allowing for significant unreported and unregulated water use.

4. Key Recommendations for Legislative/Rulemaking Action

- **Strengthen the statewide monitoring network** — Current data is inconsistent, infrequent, and not publicly accessible; C&E needs dedicated appropriations and data tools to collect, model, and publish water use forecasts.
- **Expand C&E withdrawal restriction authority** — Current law only allows restrictions on groundwater after designation of an area of concern; no parallel authority exists for surface water.
- **Establish regional water management bodies** — 2025 legislation permits regional districts; rules and guidelines are still needed for consistent management statewide.
- **Make Cooperative Endeavor Agreements mandatory for surface water withdrawal** (amend La. R.S. 30:961) — Transitioning from voluntary to required agreements would create joint liability and reinforce sustainable use.
- **Develop a water valuation model** — No quantitative framework currently exists for fair market value of water resources; needed for both regulatory decisions and long-term supply planning.
- **Adopt a water budget** — The water budget should quantify inputs and outputs.
- **Finalize a comprehensive water management plan** — C&E is designated lead but has not yet developed a program or begun rulemaking; the plan must integrate surface and groundwater, demand forecasting, conservation incentives, and water transfer processes.

For more information about Louisiana Wildlife Federation's position, contact Rebecca Triche, Executive Director, rebecca@lawildlifefed.org or 225-344-6707.