

water and health

Health, money and water

Communities were built and still thrive around healthy, safe water resources. Communities with healthy drinking water have residents with fewer health issues. And water is essential to our fiscal health — access to quality drinking water is a key contributor to economic prosperity.

Where does your drinking water come from?

Before it gets to most Arkansans, water travels from a surface or underground source through a public or community water system. This makes it subject to the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, which authorizes the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to establish quality standards and rules to protect drinking water sources. Arkansas has more than 1100 different community water systems. Although these were built at different times under varying regulations, all must produce water that meets the rigorous SDWA standards.

Many community leaders cite aging water infrastructure as one of their greatest concerns.



Challenges

The major threats to Arkansas's drinking water fall into two broad categories: threats to quality and threats to quantity.

Quality's biggest threat

Historically, as people settle in an area and populations grow, public drinking water supplies become a high infrastructure priority. Many communities in Arkansas are

using infrastructure that may be as much as 100 years old. The advent of the Safe Drinking Water Act led to heavy investments in water and waste water infrastructure in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Since then, changes in water treatment technology and demands from population growth have placed extreme burdens on infrastructure. Many community leaders cite aging water infrastructure as one of their greatest concerns.

Quantity at risk

In some areas of the state, the drinking water supply is at risk. Some rural areas are facing concerns about inadequate access. Those who draw water from the alluvial aquifer in eastern Arkansas and the Sparta aquifer in southern Arkansas face issues of limited supply because the level of the aquifers has declined. Such supply issues will become more and more critical in the coming years.

Arkansas is at a critical juncture in water management.

Decisions we make now can move the state toward or away from crisis. Citizens and institutions have the opportunity to participate in those decisions now and in the next few years, or risk being left high and dry after decisions are made by others.

Arkansas' Water Future Coalition maintains that well-managed water, both now and in the future, must start with the protection of water quality, water quantity, healthy natural habitats and the recharge of groundwater aquifers.

The **Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation** commissioned the following efforts to promote policy options that achieve sustainable water resources in Arkansas.

Water Issues in Arkansas: An Unfinished Story, 2008

A summary report and a larger companion report include references, literature review and multiple perspectives on Arkansas water use.

Troubled Water (2008 AETN)

This documentary film summarizes water issues and aired in April 2008.

Arkansas' Water Future Coalition (2008)

The Coalition includes Audubon Arkansas, Arkansas Public Policy Panel, and The Nature Conservancy. The Coalition will assist the Foundation with strategies that engage Arkansans in efforts that focus on improving water policy.

Thirsty for more?

Water Issues in Arkansas:

An Unfinished Story can be found at www.wrfoundation.org

Other websites of interest:

www.anrc.arkansas.gov
www.adeq.state.ar.us
www.arkansaswater.org
www.awag.org
www.watersheds.cast.uark.edu

Arkansas' Water Future Coalition Members:

www.ar.audubon.org
www.arpanel.org
www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/arkansas



A Coalition of Audubon Arkansas, Arkansas Public Policy Panel & The Nature Conservancy, Arkansas Field Office. Funded by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

Water Glossary

Watershed

A watershed is an area of land that drains rain and snow into a particular lake or river. Arkansas has 57 "coded" watersheds, sometimes called hydrologic units, and seven regional watersheds. Decisions made by stakeholders in a watershed will affect others.

Aquifer

Groundwater is contained in aquifers, underground beds of saturated soil or rock. Arkansas is the fourth largest user of groundwater in the U.S. Water level declines and other measures indicate that aquifer withdrawals in the state are occurring at an unsustainable rate.

Riparian Zones

A general term for land areas directly influenced by a body of water. Stream banks, lake borders and marshes are typical riparian zones. A healthy riparian zone contains native plants that filter sediment and other contaminants from water and provide wildlife habitat. Loss of healthy native riparian zones reduces water quality.

Runoff

Runoff, as the term suggests, is any amount of water that runs off a surface, either into a waterway or absorbed by the soil. Runoff can transport sediment, nutrients and contaminants into surface and groundwater, and is a major culprit in loss of water quality.

Sedimentation

Sediment is the largest pollutant of water worldwide. It's the deposit and accumulation of eroded soil into waterways. Erosion from deforestation, urbanization, roads and agriculture can contribute.

Point and Nonpoint Pollution

In order to manage pollution's impact on a body of water, we must determine its starting point. If a pollutant can be traced back to a particular source, it's referred to as "point" pollution. If not, the pollution is referred to as "nonpoint."