

# WATER WATCH

## Bills Move State Closer to Long-Range Plan

By Rebecca Patrick

A summer 2014 study commissioned by the Indiana Chamber Foundation warned that without planning and proper management, the state's water supply – a longtime natural resource strength – could become a challenge for both businesses and citizens.

In other words, we don't want to be the Midwest's California, where the ongoing dire situation reflects what can happen when states put off planning and are caught unprepared.

And it's about more than just sheer water flow; water quality is also essential.

The good news is last year's research helped galvanize the Indiana Legislature's efforts and start the state on the road to having a credible water resources plan, says Sen. Ed Charbonneau of Valparaiso.

"It's impossible to overstate the importance of the water study done by the Indiana Chamber. Without a doubt, it served as the catalyst for what turned out to be a very productive legislative session."

Specifically, in the 2015 term, the Indiana General Assembly passed two important next-step pieces of legislation that center around getting better data on what water resources exist throughout the state.

Both were authored by Charbonneau.

One new law requires the Indiana Department of National Resources (IDNR) to establish a voluntary water monitoring system of surface and ground water levels. This will allow individuals and businesses with monitoring wells to report that information to IDNR, providing a more comprehensive picture of the state's water resources.

During the last decade, the number of groundwater monitoring wells dropped from nearly 100 statewide to less than 40.

"This new policy will promote the collection of groundwater monitoring data and help fill this data gap. The U.S. Geological Survey will work with the IDNR to train and quality-control the data collection," explains Vince Griffin, the Indiana Chamber's vice president of environmental and energy policy.

The other major legislation directs the Indiana Finance Authority (IFA) to commission a study and analysis of the water

utilities of the 15 largest cities in the state, plus five other smaller communities, regarding their water resources and preparation for future needs.

"We need facts before solutions. These efforts represent an important first wave in addressing a comprehensive water resources plan and ultimately addressing the issue of governance over our water resources, which right now is a hodge-podge of 500-plus municipal water utilities," Griffin surmises.

"Ultimately, this will identify best practices and weak links in our water utilities' activities around the state."

A report from IFA has to be submitted to the Legislative Council by November 1.

Concludes Charbonneau, "Bad law is created when based on flawed data. Legislation passed in 2015 has laid the groundwork for a methodical, data-driven approach to the development of a much needed state water plan."

On a related note, the Indiana Chamber's water advisory council (which guided the 2014 study) has been expanded to include the more impacted state agencies that are involved with water resources.

Jim McGoff, general counsel and director of environmental programs at IFA, and Jack Wittman, Ph.D., principal hydrologist with INTERA Incorporated and author of the Indiana Chamber water research, presented information at the group's latest meeting in early summer.

The goal of that gathering was to "help identify the next steps going forward and if further legislation is needed. There doesn't have to be. It could mean, to be honest, that what we already have is sufficient to get things moving if we just do it," Griffin maintains.

"Right now, it's about keeping our eye on the ball. It's about involving the key players – legislators, government agencies, business and industry – and making sure this is moving along.

"It's a critically important effort that impacts economic development, livelihoods and quality of life. We need a state water plan as soon as we can make it happen."



The Indiana Chamber's Vince Griffin (left) and Sen. Ed Charbonneau teamed up during the 2015 legislative session to move the state closer to a water resources plan.

**RESOURCES:** Vince Griffin and the 2014 Indiana Chamber research at [www.indianachamber.com/index.php/water-study](http://www.indianachamber.com/index.php/water-study) | Sen. Ed Charbonneau at [ed.charbonneau@iga.in.gov](mailto:ed.charbonneau@iga.in.gov)