



DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION

University of Arkansas System

Arkansas State Water Plan Focus Group Input

March 3 and 5, 2025

UADA Extension Service, Little Rock State Office, Classrooms 1 and 2

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Arkansas State Water Plan Focus Group Input

March 3 and 5, 2025

UADA Extension Service, Little Rock State Office, Classrooms 2 and 3

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March 3 and 5, 2025, Three Focus Groups

UADA Extension, Little Rock State Office, Classrooms 1 and 2

Introduction

Two focus groups were hosted by Director Chris Colclasure and Mr. Tate Wentz. Julie Robinson and Steve Siegelin facilitated two sessions on March 3 and one session on March 5, 2025. The March 3 groups focused on 1) Water Demand and 2) Flood Water. The March 5 group focused on 3) Water Quality.

Each focus group developed responses to four questions and offered and ranked recommendations.

1. Are the issues brought forward in 2014 still a current issue?
2. What, if anything, has been done to resolve the issue?
3. What pertinent information is relevant to this issue now that may not have been in 2014?
4. Are there any emerging issues in 2024?

Methodology

Colclasure and Wentz served as hosts, historical resources, and experts. They provided a status update covering past water plans and goals for this plan. Robinson and Siegelin served as neutral facilitators for the purpose of guiding the participants to develop collective responses to the four guiding questions. This input will be utilized to guide the development of the next Arkansas State Water Plan.

The groups were led through the following process. The participants were divided into four groups of two to three people somewhat randomly. Groups were assigned to a station where they brainstormed ideas or responses for one of the questions. One idea per 5” by 8” card was written down and taped to the wall. The groups rotated to the next question until they had developed ideas for all four questions (approximately 35 minutes total).

Upon rotating back to their first station, they grouped cards into themes and titled the themes. Each group reported the results from the idea generation process and the themes they developed. Other participants asked questions, added ideas, and clarified meanings of ideas. The results were the themed responses developed with the consensus of the whole group.

To prioritize the themes a two-phase voting process was used. Phase 1 provided each participant with four dots that were red, yellow, green, or blue. Each guiding question was identified by one of those colors. Participants were instructed to vote for the most important idea within each question by placing the appropriately colored dot on the idea card. Votes for all ideas in a theme are documented below. Phase 2 provided each participant with four navy blue dots different than colors from Phase 1. They were instructed to place these dots on the four highest priority ideas for which they had not

already voted. They were not restricted to the guiding questions beyond not double voting for an idea. The results below show the results of each phase of voting and the combination of the phases.

After reviewing the results of the voting process, the groups were given two minutes to make recommendations for the future. The groups rotated through all stations, adding recommendations to those offered by preceding groups. Once the recommendations were identified they were provided dots to prioritize the recommendations through voting.

In facilitation terminology: groups were formed arbitrarily and participated in rotating sticky wall idea generation (four stations using host identified prompts); groups organized and themed ideas at their first prompt; reported results to the entire group and made agreed upon refinements; sticky dot voting, as described above prioritized themes and recommendations.

Water Demand Group

Participants did not place multiple votes here.

Are the issues brought forward in 2014 still a current issue? Themes and Priorities

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Data/Science			18
Need to improve water use reporting	9	7	16
Poor understanding and projections of current and future use		1	1
Poor data quality of future demand prevents good projecting of demand		1	1

Are the issues brought forward in 2014 still a current issue?

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Municipal Demand			11
Aging Water Infrastructure	1	5	6
Reallocation from Federal Storage	3	2	5
Municipal water supply & wastewater demands. Change in geography			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Agriculture Demand			10
On Farm Conservation	3	2	5
What is Sustainable Demand for Groundwater	1	3	4
Irrigation Water Supply for Agriculture	0	1	1
Pathway to achieve sustainable demand			
Increasing 25% limit on non-riparian use			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Industrial Use			2
How much water for lithium extraction	1	1	2
Geographic shifts in demand re: mineral and gas extraction			
Where does lithium wastewater go and how much?			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Environmental Demand			0
Change “duck hunting” to environmental water needs because ducks won’t be here unless other environmental needs are met.			

Are the issues brought forward in 2014 still a current issue? Recommendations and Priorities

Recommendation	Votes
Review basis for water use numbers, finance and support data collection, enforce requirements to report, scientific. Review to ensure good data	9
Reallocation from Federal storage	3
Better water use reporting	3
Mandatory report water usage over some threshold amount	2
Address aging water infrastructure	1
Mandate solutions for high water loss	

What pertinent information is relevant to this issue in 2025? Themes and Priorities

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Technology Advancements			10
Agriculture sector adoption of technology	2	2	4
Agriculture Research Service Center	2	1	3
Arkansas Discovery Farms Program		1	1
UA Rice Research Center – Jonesboro		1	1
Large scale projects (Mississippi Alluvial Plain and Arkansas Groundwater initiative)	1		1

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Conservation Efforts			7
Natural Resources Division has been intentional about municipal use	3	1	4
Watershed management plans		1	1
Irrigation projects		1	1
Little River drought contingency pilot	1		1
Sustainable Rivers project piloted/executed			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Reporting			7
Nothing on water loss reporting	3	3	6
Water use measurements		1	1
Taskforce on water use reporting			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Education			6
UA education efforts – Dr. Henry, Mike Hamilton		3	3
Community awareness	1	1	2
Groundwater summits	1		1
Irrigation water management technicians			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Funding		4	5
State Revolving Fund (SRF) program dollars		1	1
American Rescue Plan Act dollars deployed			
Additional funding for Ag Conservation			
AR tax credit programs			
Income tax credits for conservation			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Consensus (not)	2		2

Good progress has been made

No issues have been resolved

What pertinent information is relevant to this issue in 2025? Recommendations and Priorities

Recommendation	Votes
Report water loss/use	5
Continued promotion of education efforts	5
Tie SRF (any \$) funding to long-term financial viability	2
Adopt technology for conservation	2
Incentivize farmers to grow crops through increased commodity prices	1
Resolve issues	
Incentivize adoption of efficiency programs through increased tax credits (loans?)	

What pertinent information is relevant to this issue now that may not have been in 2014?

Themes and Priorities

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Storage Quantity			13
Manage allocations	6	6	12
Decrease storage for new contracts	1		1
Allocation federal (USACE) lakes			
New authorizations for water supply (i.e. Ouachita River)			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Domestic/Industrial			13
Shifting water demand (related to change in population)	4	3	7
Increase in groundwater wells	1	1	2
Within water supply area – difference between populations shift and new population	1	1	2
Domestic demand	1	1	2

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Agriculture Conservation			8
Increased conservation adoption on farm	4		4
New irrigation water management technologies	1	2	3
Artificial intelligence (Especially in agriculture)		1	1

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Emerging or Unknown Issues	1		5
Lithium	1	3	4
Data centers			
Regulatory			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Volume Conservation			
Water reuse total rate payer costs combined water and wastewater bill			
Reuse			
What is a water user database? A better approach			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Navigation			
Extending Red River navigation channel			
Increasing Arkansas River navigable depth			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Weather			

Weather Mesonet
Climate change

What pertinent information is relevant to this issue now that may not have been in 2014?

Recommendations and Priorities

Recommendation	Votes
Accelerate on farm conservation adoption	8
Work with municipal and industrial users and Federal government to manage water supply in Federal reserve	5
Evaluate new technology water use requirements	3
Quantity growth of data centers and water use	2
Promote new irrigation technologies	

Are there any emerging issues in 2024? Themes and Priorities

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Emerging	1	1	17
Future of Federal funding	7	3	10
Lithium volume		3	3
Climate change scenarios	1	1	2
Emerging contaminants (PFAS)		1	1
Data centers and artificial intelligence		1	1
Artificial intelligence solutions			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Population Change	4	4	11
Population changes	1	2	3
Abandoned systems			
Decentralized delivery systems			
New residential demand (wells) in the Ozarks			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Agriculture			10
Irrigation technologies	3	3	6
Shifting water use aquifer (Alluvial to Sparta)	1		1
New crops grown (Projecting AR to be next California)		1	1
Metered non municipal and industrial usage	1		1
Water exporting out of state	1		1

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Miscellaneous			3
Private sector supporting conservation efforts		1	1
How do we pay for future water plans?		1	1
Water markets (pay for reducing use)	1		1
Federal storage reserves			
Inter-basin transfers			
Hydroelectric power			

Are there any emerging issues in 2024? Recommendations and Priorities

Recommendation	Votes
Evaluate shift in regional demand due to population change. Focus on efficiency and conservation practices	9
Encourage private funding/water markets for conservation	3
Assess water use and growth of lithium industry	2
Overall funding plan, water plan, conservation, infrastructure, etc.	2
Develop climate scenarios to evaluate/model future water availability	2
Utilize irrigation technologies	1

Floodwater Focus Group

Are the issues brought forward in 2014 still a current issue? Themes and Priorities

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Infrastructure	1	4	10
Infrastructure, operations and maintenance, aging River dam management, drought/flood	2	3	5

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Problems	3	1	5
Development	1		1
Stormwater issues			
Erosion/land loss			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Funding	4	1	5
Lack of insurance (rate increases National Flood Insurance Program)			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Solution	1	1	3
Enforcement of regulations			1
Compliance			
Encroachment			

Are the issues brought forward in 2014 still a current issue? Recommendations and Priorities

Recommendation	Votes
Infrastructure funding, accountability	4
Infrastructure maintenance and operations training (what are the resources?)	2
Policy solutions	1
Regulatory consistency	1
Prioritization based on risk	1
Improved mitigation efforts	

What pertinent information is relevant to this issue in 2025? Themes and Priorities

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Increasing Local Engagement	5	3	8
Awareness and reporting More focus on owner involvement in dams and levees			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Funding – flood control	3	4	7
PL-566 program revitalized (NRCS) Levee Taskforce (\$10M grants)			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Flood Risk Mapping	3	3	6
Evacuation plans Updated floodplain ordinance to increase board feet			

What pertinent information is relevant to this issue in 2025? Recommendations and Priorities

Recommendation	Votes
Identify and maintain dedicated funding	11
Improve local community involvement and oversight	1
Flood maps beyond FEMA	
Funding source website	
Describe/measure successes	

**What pertinent information is relevant to this issue now that may not have been in 2014?
Themes and Priorities**

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Miscellaneous	4		16
Aging infrastructure	3	8	11
Shifting population density		1	1
Models for governance and fiscal stability			
Complexity of issue – local/state/fed			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Nature	1	2	4
Stream gage and weather data	1		1
Nature-based solutions			
Climate change			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Data	1		3
Data (A.I.) modeling	1	1	2
More information available on levee boards			
Flood risk mapping			
Establish base level engineering availability			

**What pertinent information is relevant to this issue now that may not have been in 2014?
Recommendations and Priorities**

Recommendation	Votes
Funding	6
Training for boards and owners of infrastructure	3
Better access to data – affordable	1
Resources and training dedicated to infrastructure maintenance	

Are there any emerging issues in 2024? Themes and Priorities

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Infrastructure	3	7	11
Major flood dam control	1		1
Maintenance of infrastructure			
Lithium			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Policy	5	2	10
Future of Federal funding	2	1	3
Political climate			
Takings cases (Ideker vs. USA)			
Policy changes regulation change			
Local buy-in			
Enforcement of regulations			
Public education of floodplain			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Data	1	2	4
Better use of risk management tools		1	1
Precipitation trends			
Future of National Flood Insurance Program			

Are there any emerging issues in 2024? Recommendations and Priorities

Recommendation	Votes
Operations and maintenance funding	5
Local elected official training/education of existing policy	2
New projects	1
Provide resources dedicated to infrastructure resolutions	1

Water Quality Focus Group

Are the issues brought forward in 2014 still a current issue? Themes and Priorities

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Non-Point Source Issues	7		16
Demand for NPS conservation practices on agriculture land increasing faster than adoption	3	1	4
Hard surface development – more runoff	1	2	3
Erosion		2	2
Land best management practices needed in rural areas			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Data	1	2	10
More data needed	1	4	5
Biodiversity decline		2	2
Impaired uses			
Numeric nutrient criteria needed			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Funding	4	4	10
Stat funding for non-point source	2		2
Nutrient management – works best when voluntary and with financial incentives			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Irrigation/Groundwater Issues			1
Saltwater intrusion in groundwater	1		1

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Point Source Issues			0
Municipal and industrial			

Are the issues brought forward in 2014 still a current issue? Recommendations and Priorities

Recommendation	Votes
Accelerate adoption of conservation practices (NPS)	7
Carry forward 2014	6
Sustained or increased funding	3
Mitigation requirement for hard surface development	1
Additional studies on NPS and groundwater	1
Partnerships	

What pertinent information is relevant to this issue in 2025? Themes and Priorities

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Project Implementation	5	4	14
Poultry litter plans in Illinois River – need for stats	1	1	2
Sceptic Program in karst still needs state funding	1	1	2
Sustainable Forestry Initiative and Forest Stewardship Council voluntary adoption of streamside management zones (riparian)		1	1
Agriculture best management practices			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Science	3	4	10
Modeling NRCS Conservation Effect Assessment Project (cropland-nutrients)	2		2
Watershed management plans completed	1		1
Chloride sampling in groundwater			
Additional edge of field monitoring (Discovery Farms)			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Funding			6
NRCS funding water quality initiatives	3	2	5
Unpaved road program established (underfunded)	1		1
NRCS Initiatives with SWP components			
Increased 319 and 303d stream reaches			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Regulatory			3
Functional stream and wetland mitigation banks	2	1	3
National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Permits	1		1
Stormwater detention			
Water quality trading			

What pertinent information is relevant to this issue in 2025? Recommendations and Priorities

Recommendation	Votes
Improved public education	6
Targeted projects/studies	5
Maintain Federal funding and staffing	3
More funding of unpaved roads	1
Improve/maintain science	1
More funding sceptic	1

**What pertinent information is relevant to this issue now that may not have been in 2014?
Themes and Priorities**

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Data	8	4	13
Additional water quality data	1		1
Data analysis AI			
Improved water usage/monitoring data			
Improve testing capabilities			
More emphasis on Delta streams (water quality monitoring)			
PFAS/PFOA			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Development			10
Increase in private development along rivers/streams	4	1	5
Population changes	3		3
Large treatment plants vs smaller package treatment (Lake Conway)	1	1	2
Water use and quality with lithium			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Planning	1		6
Watershed management plans	1	3	4
Nutrient management plan update – new watershed prioritizations		2	2
Nutrient Management Plan trend analysis			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Climate Change	1		1
Coal plant closing			
More interest in nature-based solutions			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Funding			0
Targeted Federal funding for conservation			
Sustainable River Program			

What pertinent information is relevant to this issue now that may not have been in 2014?

Recommendations and Priorities

Recommendation	Votes
Protect riparian zones	11
Funding for additional data and analysis	5
Collect more data	1
Incorporate weather and precipitations changes in plans	1
Develop uniform zoning guidance	1
Lack of support for science over short-term profits	

Are there any emerging issues in 2024? Themes and Priorities

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Demand	3		17
Increasing population and urban centers	2	4	6
Sackett case, WOTUS	1	2	3
Development on wetlands		1	1
Stormwater from development	1		1
Outdoor recreation growth (mountain biking, kayaks, etc.)		1	1
Data and crypto mines		1	1
Lithium		1	1

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Funding	6	3	10
Uncertainty of Federal funds – WQ Legislature		1	1

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Mitigation			6
Recognize the benefits of and encourage nature-based solutions		3	3
Need water quality trading platform		2	2
Availability of mitigation banks		1	1
Agricultural land easements			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Emerging Contaminants	5	4	9
PFAS/PFOA			
HABS			
Cyanobacteria toxins - algal blooms			
Pharmaceuticals (personal care)			
Endocrine disrupting chemicals			
Microplastics			

Theme/Idea	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Miscellaneous			0
Nuclear waste storage			
Climate change			

Are there any emerging issues in 2024? Recommendations and Priorities

Recommendation	Votes
Legislature develops new funding	6
Private sector funding for conservation	3
Better urban planning	3
Improve recycling programs/initiatives	2
Nature-based solutions	1
Implement water quality trading platform	1
Increased monitoring of emerging contaminants	1
Rehire Federal scientist recently fired	
Increase funding	

Summary

The focus group members collaborated well, working together and independently to develop ideas. The facilitated discussion helped members understand each other's input and ideas and provided clarification where abbreviations or jargon were not clear to the group. Expert and historical input and answers to questions were provided by Colclasure and Wentz. Participants also answered questions and helped improve understanding within the group. In summary, each group developed core categories and recommendations based on four guiding questions.

Water Demand

Participants in the Water Demand focus group noted the following categories as pressing topics in 2024. Additionally, focus group members provided recommendations based on programs, policy, and funding that could be addressed by the state in the next Water Plan.

Topic Area	Total Votes
Data/Science	18
Future of Federal Funding	17
Storage Quantity	13
Domestic/Industrial Demand	13
Municipal Demand	11
Agricultural Demand	10
Technology Advancements	10

Floodwater

Participants in the Floodwater focus group noted the following categories as pressing topics in 2024.

Topic Area	Total Votes
Aging Infrastructure	32
Policy	10
Increasing Local Engagement	8
Funding for Flood Control	7

Water Quality

Participants in the Water Quality focus group noted the following categories as pressing topics in 2024.

Topic Area	Total Votes
Data	23
Funding	20
Water Demand	17
Non-Point Source Issues	16
Project Implementation	14
Science	10
Development	10