

## **Permitting Public Water Supplies in North Carolina in Comprehensive-Integrated Management**

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Droughts of 2001-2002 and 2007-2008 and a controversial inter-basin transfer decision have led the General Assembly to rewrite one state statute on water allocation and order up a study of all water management policies. Both of these actions were taken to address issues related to public water supplies, and responses have focused largely on changes to and expansion of state authority over withdrawal permits. In that discussion, we should not overlook larger contextual factors that significantly affected how water supply decisions are or could be made. Public water supply is but one piece of a more comprehensive framework. Of all normal pool level storage in reservoirs in NC, only 13 percent is in reservoirs used for public water supply. By contrast two-thirds of that storage is in reservoirs used for hydroelectric power generation, in reservoirs that are either owned by or licensed by federal agencies. Over three-fourths of the storage is owned by private power companies and federal agencies over which state government has modest influence in matters of water management. About 45 percent of maximum pool storage in NC reservoirs is for flood control. All of these purposes, as well as instream uses for water quality and aquatic ecosystems, should be brought into play to construct and periodically update basinwide plans to inform allocation decisions. Furthermore, water allocation decisions should not be limited to consideration of available supply and its best uses. To meet future needs in an arena where there is greater competition among users, the supply side must be integrated with demand side management. But it will take much more than simply writing regulations for conservation if demand side considerations are to be effectively introduced in allocation decisions. The quality of available information will have to be substantially improved, and benchmarks for efficient use of water will have to be established if we are to weigh needs of one user against needs of others in making rational allocations. Benchmarks need not be regulatory standards, but they should be used in judging requests to expand supplies that have the potential to adversely affect competing users. Any changes in current allocation policies should address the need for comprehensive planning and integration of supply and demand management.