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Report Highlights

Louisiana's Management of Water Resources

Audit Control # 40190007
Performance Audit Services • February 2020

Why We Conducted This Audit

We conducted this audit because multiple studies, which are cited throughout this report, have documented various threats to Louisiana's water resources. These threats include a decline in water levels because of drought or over pumping, which in turn have resulted in low surface water flows, impaired surface water quality, and degraded groundwater quality due to saltwater intrusion in some areas of the state. These studies have also recommended various solutions, such as the implementation of regional planning processes and the development of a comprehensive statewide management plan, many of which have not been implemented.

What We Found

Overall, Louisiana must improve its management of water resources throughout the state. Although Louisiana is perceived as a "water rich" state, it faces threats to its water resources, including declining water levels, saltwater intrusion, and attempts from other states to use our water. Therefore, it is important for Louisiana to properly manage its water resources and develop a comprehensive statewide plan to guide these efforts. Specifically, we found the following:

- **Louisiana is experiencing multiple issues related to water, including water level decline and saltwater intrusion due to excessive groundwater withdrawals.** In addition, because the future sustainability of Louisiana's water resources may be threatened by other states that seek to obtain our water, it is important that Louisiana know how much water it will need for its own use. For example, in 2011, a Texas entity approached the Sabine River Authority (SRA) to purchase water from Toledo Bend at a rate of \$0.28 per thousand gallons for an initial period of 50 years. However, according to SRA's board, it suspended out-of-state water sales because of public concern with the length of the contract and the lack of information on how the purchase would affect water levels.
- **Louisiana has taken some steps to mitigate its water issues, but state and local entities may need to be given more authority to better manage their water resources.** For example, the state has increased its groundwater and surface water monitoring sites that measure water levels and chloride concentration in aquifers. However, some state and local entities do not have sufficient authority to regulate water use, and others are not using their authority effectively.
- **Since 1956, Louisiana has spent at least \$5.3 million to conduct 12 studies on water resources and management strategies, and many of these recommended that the state develop a comprehensive management plan. However, Louisiana still does not have a comprehensive water management plan.** A comprehensive water management plan would help ensure that the state's water resources are protected, conserved, and replenished for the health, safety, and welfare of Louisiana citizens.

Why is it important to protect the water resources in Louisiana?

"Just as oil came to define much of the economic and social development in the twentieth century, water is increasingly seen as the defining resource of the twenty-first century. Whether or not water is 'the new oil,' as some have claimed, it is clear that the availability of dependable supplies of fresh water is already transforming our economic and cultural landscapes. As the state's and the nation's growth, energy, and environmental priorities evolve, water is often the common denominator."

Source: A Defining Resource: Louisiana's Place in the Emerging Water Economy

Appendix E contains USGS water use fact sheets for each parish, including how much water is withdrawn by water source and category of use.

View the full report at www.lla.la.gov.