

USU Professors Advise State Government on Water Policy

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A strategy for developing Utah water policy—that began with a task force appointed by Governor Gary Herbert in 2013 and grew to a group of more than 40 people with a wide array of expertise—was delivered to the governor in mid-July in hopes of guiding policy development to manage the state’s water until 2060.

Utah State University Professors Joanna Endter-Wada and Robert Gillies, who also serves as the state climatologist, were among those tasked with looking at many aspects of water use in Utah and developing strategies to help the state manage the convergence of two important distinctions: being one of the driest states in the nation and also one of the fastest growing. As the report’s executive summary points out, the “...challenge is magnified by climate projections from the state climatologist that show a significant decrease in Utah’s snowpack, which presently provides more annual water storage capacity than all of Utah’s human-made reservoirs combined.”

Gillies said each section of the report tackles an important water policy question and possible answers to guide state agencies and policy makers as they plan to manage this important resource.

“Water is the critical resource here and around the world,” Gillies said. “Without water, you can’t have agriculture, can’t feed your people or develop industries.”

Among the questions headlining each section of the report are, “What should we do to preserve natural systems in the face of increasing water demand?” and “In what ways will weather and a changing climate impact future water supply and demand?”

Gillies said the people who came together to gather data and create the report were all deeply engaged in their particular area of expertise, whether it was engineering, water quality, industry, politics, climate science or human behavior. He added that while the report is the product of compromises, careful wording and debate, overall he thinks it is an important and valuable guide for planning the state’s future.

A printable version of the 201-page report is available at <http://www.envisionutah.org/projects/utah-water-strategy>.

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