

2017 LEGISLATIVE SNAPSHOT

Montana Water Plan and the Water Information System

From the Montana State Library

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SNAPSHOT #10

Montana's economy and quality of life rely on water for everything from recreation to municipal and domestic uses. However, it's a limited resource that varies from year to year. The 2015 State Water Plan provides recommendations for managing the state's water resources during the next 20 years; one key recommendation is to increase access to information on Montana's water resources. Creating good policy that anticipates and addresses water issues requires ready access to up-to-date information. The Water Information System (WIS) at the Montana State Library makes high-quality data on surface water, groundwater, water rights, water supply, water quality, watersheds, and more available to the public through GIS, maps, applications, and webpages.

- Agricultural irrigation is the largest consumptive water use in Montana (approximately 68 percent). In comparison, domestic use accounts for about 0.4 percent of the water consumed in Montana.
- The State Water Plan makes 68 recommendations intended to guide water policy and how Montana can address key water-related issues.
- The Montana Hydrography Dataset, maintained and updated by the State Library, provides a statewide digital spatial representation of the state's waters, including streams, rivers, lakes, springs, gauges, and dams. The dataset shows that Montana has nearly 200,000 lakes and ponds and more than 50,000 miles of named streams and rivers that flow year-round.
- Drought impacts Montana's economy and livelihoods. An archive of county drought status maps is available for nearly every month from 2002 to present through the Montana Water Information System.
- In coordination with the NRCS, the State Library publishes monthly maps of water supply, including precipitation, streamflow forecasts, reservoir levels, Surface Water Supply Index, and Snow Water Equivalent. Maps are available as far back as 1992.

