



# COMPREHENSIVE WATER REVIEW

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## Comprehensive Water Review

The Comprehensive Water Review is the evaluation and reformation of state water administration undertaken by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to meet future water needs and protect existing users in the state of Montana. Stakeholder Working Groups representing a diverse array of water users are leading the conversation and providing recommendations for action. Over the last year, Stakeholder Working Groups have tackled challenging water quantity issues through constructive and deliberative dialog, ensuring that water issues are comprehensively addressed.

## Key Challenges Identified

The Comprehensive Water Review of water right administration and management requires significant stakeholder input and a comprehensive look so that Montana can meet its water needs of the 21st Century. To that end, the DNRC Water Resources Division (WRD) developed these Key Water Challenges and proposed Action Plans based on input received during the Governor's Red Tape Initiative and executive branch feedback, as well as WRD's stakeholder listening sessions, comments, and online public surveys. Many of these challenges were also identified in the 2015 State Water Plan and in discussions with the Water Policy Interim Committee. These Key Challenges aim to comprehensively address water administration and management over the course of the next three biennia:

1. **Final Decree Transition:** Determine if the current statutory structure for the post final decree administration and regulation of water rights is adequate to meet future water policy objectives.
2. **Water Right Application Process:** Evaluate and update the water right application process so that it is timely, transparent, streamlined, and consistent.
3. **Changes, Mitigation, and Exceptions:** Evaluate the coordination of water development, use, and protection to meet new demands in Montana.
4. **Drought Management:** Develop tools, information, and policy recommendations to support drought adaptation and mitigation efforts of Montana communities and businesses.
5. **Water Rights Query System:** Update the Water Right Query System to be a user-friendly tool that easily provides access to full, accurate, detailed information about Montana water rights.
6. **Water Division Website:** A new website will provide tools, resources, and information driven by public needs, metrics of use, and keyword searching.
7. **Stakeholder Engagement, Outreach, and Education:** Consistent and proactive water education and outreach activities are necessary to provide a foundation for the informed management of Montana's water resources now and into the future.

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## 2023 Proposed Legislation as a Result of Comprehensive Water Review Stakeholder Working Groups

### SB 72

Water Distribution &  
Administration After Adjudication  
*Senator Fitzpatrick, Bill Sponsor*

### HB 114

Permit & Change Process Overhaul  
*Representative Vinton, Bill Sponsor*

## Future Stakeholder Working Group Topics

To the extent that issues are not addressed during session, the Stakeholder Working Groups will continue their conversations and develop recommendations after session on how to:

- Design an effective mitigation, and marketing for mitigation, framework.
- Promote effective and efficient development, planning and growth.
- Reexamine the use of permit exceptions (exempt wells).
- Evaluation of water distribution and disputes.
- Examine water complaints and enforcement.