



# Legislative Post Audit Report Highlights

Water-Related Agencies:  
 A K-GOAL Audit Determining Whether the State Could Achieve Efficiencies and Reduce Costs by Combining the Operations of Its Water-Related Agencies

## Report Highlights

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### Audit Concern

Several State agencies have primary roles in helping maintain the State's water resources. Over the years, legislators have raised concerns about whether Kansas would benefit by combining and consolidating activities related to water management and regulation into a single agency.

### Other Relevant Facts for the Question

We identified 15 primary water activities such as issuing water permits, inspecting dams, monitoring water pollution and conserving water resources.

Several State agencies are responsible for these 15 activities including:

- Department of Agriculture (Division of Water Resources)
- Department of Health and Environment
- Department of Wildlife and Parks
- Kansas Corporation Commission
- Kansas Water Authority/Kansas Water Office
- State Conservation Commission

**AUDIT QUESTION 1:** *Could Kansas achieve greater operating efficiencies and reduce costs by reorganizing the duties and responsibilities of its agencies that provide water regulation and management services?*

### AUDIT ANSWER and KEY FINDINGS:

- Kansas has a large number of agencies managing water issues, but isn't out of line compared to other western states with water laws that are similar to those in Kansas. The number of water-management agencies in western states are summarized below:

Number of State Agencies Performing 15 Main Water Management Activities (Western Water Law States Only)			
Number of State Agencies	Number of States	Percent	List of States
1	0	0%	
2	3	18%	Colorado, Montana, Texas
3	5	29%	Arizona, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah
4	3	18%	Idaho, New Mexico, Wyoming
5	4	23%	Kansas, California, Nebraska, Washington
6	1	6%	Oklahoma
11	1	6%	Oregon
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Source: LPA analysis of information on state water agencies provided by other states.

- We found few problems with the current structure of Kansas' water-related programs.
  - State and local officials told us the current organizational structure for water management doesn't need any significant changes.
  - We reviewed the purposes of programs administered by the State's main water-related agencies, and didn't find significant areas of overlap or duplication.

- State officials attributed the high level of coordination among water-related agencies in recent years to the formation of the Natural Resources Sub-Cabinet in 2003.
- We estimate that creating a single water agency may save between \$300,000 to \$7 million in administrative spending, but actual savings are likely to be on the lower end of that estimate. Based on our recent experience with other audits we think it is likely that the savings would be much less.
- We identified additional opportunities for agencies to improve their coordination and make their programs more efficient that don't involve consolidation.
  - There are opportunities for agencies' field staff to collaborate more and gain efficiencies. For example, Department of Health and Environment field staff may be able to read water meters at livestock feedlots on behalf of the Division of Water Resources.
  - Improvements could be made to monitoring WRAPS funding. The approval process for WRAPS projects is well coordinated, but the Department of Health and Environment and the State Conservation Commission should check funding sources for WRAPS projects.
  - Water agencies could take additional steps to share water data more efficiently among themselves and the public. These include creating a single webpage that links to the data portion of each water-related agency's website.
- At this time there does not appear to be any compelling reason to consolidate. While consolidating some of the agencies may offer the opportunity for some limited administrative savings, we found few problems with the current system.

## We Recommended

- We recommended that the Legislature should consider formalizing the Natural Resources Sub-Cabinet in statute.
- We made several recommendations to the agencies to address the smaller efficiency issues we identified.

**Agency Response:** *In general, the agencies agreed with the report and our recommendations.*

### DO YOU HAVE AN IDEA FOR IMPROVED GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY OR COST SAVINGS?

If you have an idea to share with us, send it to [ideas@lpa.ks.gov](mailto:ideas@lpa.ks.gov), or write to us at the address shown. We will pass along the best ones to the Legislative Post Audit Committee.

*The organizational structure of water agencies in the State has been studied several times over the last 30 years, but consolidation hasn't occurred.*

*In 2003, former Governor Sebelius created the Natural Resources Sub-Cabinet as an alternative to consolidation. This group meets weekly and has helped to improve day-to-day coordination of water-related agencies.*

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