

Water Recommendations to the Next President

The United States faces several severe and worsening water problems. Continuing to neglect these problems will impoverish and sicken this and future generations, destroy beneficial aquatic ecosystems, and threaten our economy and food supply. Smart water policies will create hundreds of thousands of jobs, improve public health, and speed our economic recovery. In this letter, we offer a short assessment of four key problems and specific recommendations for addressing them.

Problem 1: Tens of millions of Americans do not have access to safe, affordable drinking water and sanitation. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the stark health and economic consequences of this failure.

Solution: Improve federal water programs to expand access to water services and protect public health, especially in low-income communities and communities of color. Priorities include expanded federal funding for better water infrastructure, improved enforcement of water laws and regulations, and updates to those laws.

Problem 2: Climate changes are already negatively affecting U.S. water resources and the consequences will worsen in coming years.

Solution: The impacts of climate change must be integrated into water planning and management at all levels. Emphasis must be on both reducing greenhouse-gas emissions associated with our nation's water systems and helping to adapt to the now-unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Problem 3: Water resource problems pose threats to U.S. national and international security.

Solution: Appropriate federal agencies, including the defense and intelligence communities, should expand efforts to identify and analyze threats to vital U.S. interests related to water and commit appropriate diplomatic, technical, and other resources to address them.

Problem 4: The lack of a U.S. National Water Strategy threatens the reliability and quality of water supply and wastewater services and ultimately public health, ecosystems, and our economy.

Solution: The next president should immediately create a new National Water Commission for the 21st Century to evaluate and recommend specific federal actions to improve national water policy.