



# STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FISCAL YEARS 2023 THROUGH 2027

State of Nevada | Department of Conservation &  
Natural Resources | Division of Water Resources

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# MISSION

The mission of the Nevada Division of Water Resources (NDWR) is: *To responsibly manage Nevada's limited water resources in accordance with State law and best available science.*

# VISION

NDWR is dedicated to actively managing water resources for the benefit of Nevada citizens in a way that protects the resource for long-term sustainability, and to provide the public access to information, assistance and exemplary service in performing the duties and responsibilities of the Division.

# ABOUT NDWR

NDWR was created in 1903 to provide a means to adjudicate water rights in Nevada. NDWR's role and responsibilities have expanded significantly over the years, and currently encompass the following core functions:

- Quantifying existing water rights
- Monitoring water use
- Distributing water in accordance with court decrees
- Reviewing water availability for new subdivisions and condominiums
- Regulating the construction and safe operation of dams
- Appropriating geothermal water
- Licensing and regulating well drillers and water rights surveyors
- Maintaining water resource data and records
- Providing technical assistance to the public and governmental agencies
- Developing and updating Nevada's State Water Plan and coordinating drought response

NDWR has the authority to enforce Nevada's Water Law under Title 48 of the Nevada Revised Statutes.

Housed within the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, NDWR is administered by the State Engineer and three Deputy Administrators, and the organizational chart is structured into major subject areas within NDWR's purview. The main office is in Carson City with four field offices in Las Vegas, Elko, Winnemucca, and Eureka. Extensive coordination among the various NDWR Sections is vital to fulfilling the collective mission of NDWR.

The State Engineer also appoints a Well Driller's Advisory Board, a five-member body whose duties include examining and interviewing potential licensees regarding their knowledge and experience of well drilling and Nevada's well drilling regulations to make recommendations to approve or deny licensure.

# PURPOSE

The purpose of NDWR's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan is to establish the foundation for goals and objectives of NDWR in performing its duties and responsibilities, as well as providing metrics to assess NDWR's progress in accomplishing these goals. This five-year Strategic Plan is reviewed annually and updated biennially. This plan contains seven goals, each with each goal relating to one of NDWR's core functions. Specific objectives further define the process and intent for each goal.

# EXTERNAL FACTORS

There are several factors outside NDWR's control that may impact achievement of the goals outlined within this plan, including:

-  Funding Availability
-  Litigation and Court Decisions
-  Federal and State Regulatory Actions or Mandates



# GOAL 1: Manage the appropriation of water resources as required by statute to optimize the beneficial use and conservation of water resources in Nevada.

**BACKGROUND:** NDWR is responsible for managing the allocation of Nevada’s water resources through a processes established in accordance with Nevada Water Law. NDWR reviews new applications for water rights and changes of existing water rights, maintains records of ownership, and processes extensions of time. Due to increasing complexity, limited staff and resources, timeliness in review of applications has been delayed.

## Objective 1: Improve the processing timeline for major elements of water right administration: water right applications, proofs of beneficial use, extensions of time, and changes of ownership.

- **Strategy 1: Streamline internal processes to increase efficiency and timely processing of applications.** Current processing steps are under review to identify redundancies and develop a plan to add efficiency by updating and modifying the NDWR’s internal processes. NDWR tracks the processing time for each submittal with the goal of reducing the time to process these applications.
- **Strategy 2: Hire additional staff to meet the increasing demand and workload.** The increasing complexity of Nevada’s water resource management along with competing demands across the state have significantly increased the both the demand for services and the workload of NDWR staff. To meet the needs of the public for timely and thorough review of applications, NDWR is requesting additional staff over the next two biennium to support improved services and workload balance.

## PERFORMANCE METRICS:

Water Right Submittal Tracking	Unit	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
Median Time to Act on Water Right Application	Days	110	104	99	94	90
Median Time to Act on Proof of Beneficial Use	Days	200	190	180	170	160
Median Time to Act on Report of Conveyance	Days	100	95	90	86	81
Pending Extension of Time Submittals	Each	1250	1100	940	790	750

**GOAL 2:** Expand and enhance the Adjudication and Dam Safety programs within NDWR to meet State and Federal requirements and the needs and expectations of the public.

**Objective 1: Position NDWR’s Adjudication Section to be prepared and responsive to the December 31, 2027, sunset date to file claims of vested rights.**

NDWR's Adjudication Section consists of seven employees and is responsible for processing claims of vested rights and conducting adjudications of pre-statutory uses of water in accordance with NRS Chapter 533. An adjudication can take several years to complete due to myriad factors, including statutory timelines, requests for extensions by external parties, staff/resource constraints, along with actual time to perform the field investigations, draft the required orders and hold hearings. Currently, less than 3% of the state’s groundwater basins are fully adjudicated. The workload will continue to increase as the sunset date approaches and the public’s expectations for timely adjudication of those pre-statutory claims will become more prevalent. To address this issue, NDWR is reviewing internal processes to identify opportunities to enhance efficiency and to optimize staff assignments and resource needs to perform these statutory requirements as well as requesting additional positions to add additional staff capacity the section.

NDWR is also responsible for managing the distribution of surface water in accordance with decrees. This is a primary duty of the field offices and seasonal staff. NDWR is developing a regional decree administration plan for the distribution and regulation of decreed waters that do not have such a plan.

**PERFORMANCE METRICS:**

Adjudications Program	Unit	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
New Adjudications initiated	Each	0	1	2	3	3
Preliminary Orders of Determination signed by the State Engineer	Each	2	2	3	4	4
Orders of Determination signed by the State Engineer	Each	2	2	2	3	4

**Objective 2: Expand the Dam Safety Program’s capacity to enable NDWR to act in conformance with the updated 2022 FEMA Model Dam Safety Program.**

Nevada has approximately 625 jurisdictional dams that are inspected by NDWR. Core functions of NDWR’s Dam Safety Program include inspecting dams on a regular basis and to review and approve any engineered plans for construction or rehabilitation of dams. Many dams across Nevada are reaching their design life and will require extensive repairs or modifications to ensure public safety in the future. Repair and maintenance are the responsibility of the owner, but the dams are owned and operated by a variety of different groups and citizens with varying levels of resources and expertise.

Nevada’s dam safety regulations under NAC 535 are not in conformance with federal standards updated in 2022. Updating NDWR's regulations is critical to ensuring dams and other impoundments are designed and built to meet or exceed the current industry standards. The Dam Safety Program strives to expand services provided to the public, reduce processing delays of dam safety documents, update all Emergency Action Plans, and provide training for local dam owners and officials. As resources are available, an additional ongoing objective of NDWR is to establish and maintain agreements with other state, local, and federal partners to aid in the response of a dam incident or emergency.

**PERFORMANCE METRICS:**

<b>Expand and enhance the Dam Safety Program</b>	<b>Unit</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>	<b>FY 2024</b>	<b>FY 2025</b>	<b>FY 2026</b>	<b>FY 2027</b>
Time to conduct initial review of dam application	Days	80	70	60	50	40
Dam applications under review for final approval	Each	24	20	20	18	16
Outreach with dam owners	Each	10	20	30	30	30
High Hazard dams that have an up-to-date Emergency Action Plan on file	Percentage*	60	70	80	90	94
Percent of High Hazard Inspections Completed that are due	Percentage*	100	100	100	100	100
Percent of Significant Hazard Inspections Completed that are due	Percentage*	100	100	100	100	100
Percent of Low Hazard Inspections Completed that are due	Percentage*	100	100	100	100	100

*\*Numbers reported in calendar year totals*

## GOAL 3: Modernize record keeping and document processing to improve public services and preserve historic data.

**BACKGROUND:** NDWR has a collection of records dating back to before the Office of the State Engineer was created in 1903. Many records maintained by NDWR are supporting documentation of historical water rights and water right holder information. It is imperative that these records are preserved due to their historical significance and relevance to water rights still in use today. Currently, all records are physically maintained either within NDWR's office in Carson City or at a Library and Archives approved off-site storage facility. NDWR's current offices lack additional space to accommodate more records, requiring future reliance on off-site storage for many of the documents, which is impracticable. Convenient and reliable access to NDWR records is essential both for the public and for staff. Further, many water management decisions are supported by these historical records and data. Most documents submitted to NDWR can only be submitted in paper format and most fees are paid by check without an electronic payment option.

**Objective 1: Preserve public records, increase public accessibility to documents retained by NDWR, improve operational efficiency, reduce reliance on paper, and eliminate the need for additional physical space to store records and the cost to store records off-site.**

- **Strategy 1: Evaluate existing digital management system and transition to receiving, processing, and cataloguing all documents electronically.** NDWR currently maintains electronic copies of many records; however, these may not be up to the standards required for the official records of the office. NDWR will evaluate the requirements of official records in accordance with state records retention and archiving requirements and develop an operation plan to meet these standards.
- **Strategy 2: Digitize historical paper documents and records.** Utilizing an approved document management software and appropriate computer hardware, NDWR will digitize all existing paper records. Digitized records will be reviewed for quality control and catalogued in a searchable and accessible format. In coordination with the digitization, NDWR will implement public access to digitized records via the NDWR website.
- **Strategy 3: Expand services offered through NDWR's website.** NDWR allows the public to submit select documents online with an electronic filing fee. NDWR aims to expand these services by adding additional forms and documents, including additional water right application forms, water right maps, and well drilling records, as well as electronic processing of fees. NDWR also aims to provide mapping services and easier access to hydrologic data collected by NDWR and its cooperators.

### PERFORMANCE OUTCOME:

With appropriate funding, NDWR will initiate a program to preserve historic documents and provide the public with access to records maintained by NDWR. Over the next four years, NDWR has identified two primary goals: (1) digitize 80% of its on-site records and make 100% of public records accessible on its website; and (2) enable every submission and payment to be capable of being done in an electronic format.

# GOAL 4: Enhance the capacity of NDWR through employee development and career advancement to better serve the public and support employee retention.

**BACKGROUND:** Employee recruitment, retention, and retirements across NDWR highlight the need to improve the onboarding process for new employees and provide continual training opportunities to employees thereafter. Continuing education and career development opportunities will enrich the expertise and capacity of NDWR and better serve the public who rely on its services.

**Objective 1: Recruit, develop, and maintain trained and experienced staff through continuing education and employment development opportunities.**

- **Strategy 1: Develop a robust onboarding and training program for NDWR employees by January 1, 2023.** NDWR's newly established training committee is developing a robust and improved onboarding and training program for new and existing staff. This training program will consist of recorded and live training events for staff to attend and learn the duties of their position.
- **Strategy 2: Maintain consistent employee development opportunities through internal continuing education classes, cross-training, inviting guest speakers from outside NDWR, and supporting attendance at industry trainings in-state and out-of-state.** NDWR will develop and provide training opportunities for staff to further their knowledge and skills. This includes increasing the availability of staff to attend seminars or other training events held outside of NDWR. NDWR is requesting funding to restore its training budget, which was removed to achieve prior budget reduction goals.

## PERFORMANCE OUTCOME:

NDWR will provide a thorough onboarding program to new staff and will enrich the opportunities for all staff for continuing education and training.



# GOAL 5: Establish contemporary water availability data for the State of Nevada through the Water Resource Initiative

**BACKGROUND:** *Water right appropriations are based on a determination of whether there is water available at the source of supply pursuant to NRS 533.370(2). Determining groundwater availability into the future requires an accurate and up-to-date understanding of water budgets. The Water Resource Initiative will utilize the best available science to update the current knowledge and understanding of basin-scale water budgets in Nevada. This baseline will allow NDWR to make legally defensible and forward-looking determinations of water availability in the administration of water resources in Nevada. It will also provide data to support governing body Water Resource Plans developed in accordance with NRS 278.0228.*

*The Water Resource Initiative is a collaborative effort among the State Engineer's Office, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) Nevada Water Science Center, and the Desert Research Institute (DRI). The initiative will build on existing studies and data, and leverage work already completed by the State Engineer's Office, DRI, USGS, and others. This partnership effort will also evaluate changes over time and include projections relating to climate change. The outcomes of the initiative serve as a basis to inform economic development, infrastructure improvements, and growth patterns in Nevada.*

*Launching the Water Resource Initiative is contingent on funding requests pending as of the date of this Strategic Plan.*

**Objective 1: Update the baseline understanding of water budgets across Nevada using foundational hydrologic datasets and state-of-the-art, objective, and non-biased methods of analysis.**

**Objective 2: Incorporate findings into management scheme to support sustainable, responsible management of Nevada's water resources into the future.**

## **PERFORMANCE OUTCOME:**

This work will provide the baseline information needed to make determinations of water availability across Nevada. NDWR will have updated water budget data at the basin scale to support its management decisions and facilitate responsible management of Nevada's water resources. Additionally, this work will support Water Resource Plans required for Nevada's governing bodies.

## GOAL 6: Update the Nevada State Water Plan

**BACKGROUND:** *As the driest state in the nation, effective management of Nevada’s water resources requires comprehensive planning. NDWR is currently updating the State Water Plan to serve as a high-level policy and planning guide. This Plan will focus on addressing Nevada’s many complex water challenges with a collaborative, pragmatic, and science-based approach. The State Water Plan will update the previous version published in 1999, providing a modern product to help inform and direct future water resource policy by providing the latest analysis, recommendations, and documentation.*

*NDWR is committed to an engaged and transparent planning process to create a contemporary State Water Plan. Various levels of public involvement, general outreach, and education will be critical components to the development of a high-functioning plan. While primarily authored by NDWR, technical experts from partnering agencies will also be important contributors to the final State Water Plan. The updated plan aims to be complementary to, and will not supersede, local and regional water resource plans developed in accordance with NRS 278.0228.*

**Objective 1: Strategically plan for sustainably managing and developing water resources for current and future generations.**

- **Strategy 1: Solicit and incorporate public views and priorities from a diverse representation of Nevada’s citizens.** A better understanding of the public’s current views and priorities provides context for the development of a contemporary State Water Plan.
- **Strategy 2: Work with professional partners throughout the state to incorporate data and variables beyond the expertise of NDWR staff during the development of the State Water Plan.**
- **Strategy 3: Prepare and distribute intermediate findings and a final product that is well-supported and high-functioning for current and future generations.**

### **PERFORMANCE OUTCOME:**

The State Water Plan will provide an updated and broad reaching basis to assist the state, its local governments and its citizens in developing effective and realistic plans for the use of water.

## GOAL 7: Build and sustain relationships with the public served.

**BACKGROUND:** *Establishing and maintaining positive and constructive relationships with those reliant on Nevada’s water resources is critical to the mission of NDWR. While NDWR regularly communicates with individual water right holders or applicants to meet specific needs, to effectively address contemporary water resource management challenges, NDWR must also have cooperative and productive relationships with local governing bodies and interest groups. These regular engagement support water management strategies that effectively meet local needs while complying with Nevada water law.*

**Objective 1: Maintain regular public outreach and stakeholder engagement at a local scale.** NDWR is most effective when staff engage with water users in the state to understand the local water resources issues, challenges, and opportunities. Through this dialogue, NDWR will work with the affected communities to help them understand their options and constraints in administering water resource management.

**Objective 2: Maintain public outreach through engagement with county commissions, local government representatives, and other policy makers.** NDWR will participate and engage with local, and state elected officials regarding water resource issues, including providing information to elected officials as requested and attending or presenting at public meetings as needed.

**Objective 3: Foster cooperative relationships with water resource organizations, industry groups, researchers, and non-governmental organizations.** Communication and cooperation with state, regional, and local water resource groups will help NDWR understand different priorities and perspectives and develop relationships with stakeholders throughout the state. Participation and engagement on specific issues is necessary to support effective decisions by NDWR.

### PERFORMANCE METRICS:

Public and Community Engagement	Unit	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
Meet with county, city, and other local governing bodies	Annual	6	6	6	6	6
General water resource community meetings	Annual	6	6	6	6	6
Attend statewide, regional, or local water resource or governmental professional conferences or meetings	Annual	3	3	3	3	3