

Water Resources Update on Integrated Resource Planning for Water Utilities

FOREWORD

by

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This issue of Water Resources Update is devoted entirely to integrated resource planning (IRP) for water utilities. The topic is both narrow and broad. In the applied research literature, IRP is represented as planning tool, a paradigm shift, and everything in between. The term may be so “soft” that it does not take on real meaning until actually applied. A practical perspective is that IRP promotes a more open and participatory planning process, and places demand and supply management resource options on equal footing when seeking the least-cost means of meeting future water needs. IRP encourages inclusion, not only of participants but of institutions and issues relevant to the planning process. In particular, IRP provides a more explicit means of addressing institutional conflict, environmental externalities, and uncertainty.

Twelve authors devoted themselves to the task of writing about IRP for this issue, unconstrained by any particular definition or perspective. What the authors share is a belief that integrated planning is better than the available alternatives, particularly the more closed and exclusive processes. The result is an eclectic but very complimentary collection of articles constituting variations on the IRP theme.

Included are two prominent case studies of IRP and a series of articles focusing on key topics related to the practice of IRP, including the role of conservation, decision making methods, avoided-cost analysis, environmental externalities, strategic management, and incentives. Broadening the perspective is an article considering the application of IRP concepts to stormwater management. The institutional context and the role of the federal government in water planning also are considered. Finally, the issue concludes with tongue-in-cheek summary of “how to botch” an IRP analysis.

I extend my sincere admiration and appreciation to all of the authors, who took time from very busy schedules to share their experiences and insights by contributing to this issue.