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***Let’s Talk About Water***

**Generic water issue framework**

April 2017

Your title:

Your introduction:

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|  | **OPTION ONE** | **OPTION TWO** | **OPTION THREE** |
|  | **Protect the Health and Safety of People and Communities** | **Work with Nature to Create Sustainable Water Systems** | **Make Pragmatic Economic Decisions about Water Resources**  |
| **Description** | Water is a public good. We should provide water fairly to protect the security and well-being of people and communities, and protect everyone from harm from floods and storm surges driven by extreme and changing weather patterns. Water should be used carefully and with minimal waste to ensure that everyone has enough clean water to meet their needs. | Water is part of nature. We must create water systems that are sustainable for people and nature. Many of our water systems work against nature rather than with it, and despite some efforts, nature often gets short-changed. Human communities are intertwined with a healthy environment, so we need to make it top priority. | Water is a resource essential to our livelihoods and our quality of life. We should supply plenty of clean water where people and businesses want it. Government and other power brokers should stop manipulating who gets water, and we should make water allocation decisions using markets so that water goes to its highest economic good.  |

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|  | **Option One:** **Protect the Health and Safety of People and Communities** |
| **Description** | Water is a public good. We should provide water fairly to protect the security and well-being of people and communities, and protect everyone from harm from floods and storm surges driven by extreme and changing weather patterns. Water should be used carefully and with minimal waste to ensure that everyone has enough clean water to meet their needs. ***But***this focus on human needs could create or ignore longer-term, systemic environmental problems. And the requirements of this approach could impinge on personal and corporate freedoms. |
|  | **Types of actions that fit this option** | **Tradeoffs** |
|  | 1) Plan for sufficient supply of clean water to meet communities’ needs | Focusing on human needs could shortchange the environment and wildlife. |
|  | 2) Require water conservation practices for agriculture, oil and gas extraction, and other industries | The cost of meeting these requirements could make industries less viable. |
|  | 3) Use incentives to adjust water use  | Incentive systems allow the government to pick and choose winners and losers in the market. |
|  | 4) Restrict development where it could threaten water supplies, where water supplies are already contaminated, or where rising flood levels or storm surge threaten. | Restrictions would interfere with private property rights, and in some places would offer little protection from catastrophic flooding due to extreme weather and changing climate. |
|  | 5) Use technology that minimizes waste and pollution | Technologies can have unanticipated side effects and can be expensive and uncertain to develop. |
|  | 6) Research and require best management practices to reduce pollution and waste from farms, industry, and other water users | Requirements like these can impose one-size-fits all solutions on businesses and communities, which may unfairly burden small and struggling communities and businesses.  |
|  | 7) Enforce strict water quality regulations, especially for drinking water | Regulations can be expensive to meet and enforce, decreasing the international competitiveness of US businesses. |
|  | 8) Engage residents as community scientists to help monitor and identify pollution problems.  | This could create a sort of vigilantism. |

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|  | **Option Two:** **Work with Nature to Create Sustainable Water Systems** |
| **Description** | Water is part of nature. We must create water systems that are sustainable for people and nature. Many of our water systems work against nature rather than with it, and despite some efforts, nature often gets short-changed. Human communities are intertwined with a healthy environment, so we need to make it top priority. ***But*** this approach may involve changes that impinge on personal choices and freedom and commit resources to environmental protection at the expense of more immediate community needs. |
|  | **Types of actions that fit this option** | **Tradeoffs** |
|  | 1) Ensure that enough water is kept in rivers and streams to support natural areas and wildlife  | When there is not enough water to go around, this could disadvantage human communities. |
|  | 2) Protect, restore, and construct where needed natural flood protection, water storage, and water filtration systems like wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, and floodplain buffers | This approach could impinge on private property rights by limiting development potential. |
|  | 3) Educate to shift individual behaviors and awareness of the environmental impact of personal actions | Education can be a long-term strategy with few guarantees that personal behaviors will change. |
|  | 4) Price water to reflect all of its costs, including environmental impacts, the costs to maintain infrastructure to transport water, etc. | This could make it very expensive for cities, farms and other water-intensive businesses to operate in some parts of the country, making water a privilege rather than a basic right.  |
|  | 5) Limit development to match available water supplies and protect environmentally sensitive areas | This would impinge on personal and corporate freedoms and property rights. |
|  | 6) Recycle industrial and drinking water to minimize the amount of water we need to take from nature | Recycling water for some uses creates safety concerns and an “ick” factor that are hard to overcome.  |
|  | 7) Mandate water conservation, strict controls on polluters, and land-use regulations that minimize polluted runoff from developed areas and farms | Regulations can be expensive to meet and enforce, putting an extra burden on US businesses and interfering with local control. |
|  | 8) Sharply reduce carbon emissions to slow the rate of climate change and occurrences of extreme weather. | The dramatic actions required to counter the worst effects of climate change could harm the economy and infringe on personal choices and lifestyles. |

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|  | **Option Three:** **Make Pragmatic Economic Decisions about Water Resources** |
| **Description** | Water is a resource essential to our livelihoods and our quality of life. We should supply plenty of clean water where people and businesses want it. Government and other power brokers should stop manipulating who gets water, and we should make water allocation decisions using markets so that water goes to its highest economic good. ***But***treating water as a commodity may maintain or exacerbate disparities in water availability and quality, possibly pricing certain uses like agriculture and environmental protection out of the market when others are willing to pay more.  |
|  | **Types of actions that fit this option** | **Tradeoffs** |
|  | 1) Build infrastructure to get water where it is needed most, and keep floods and storm surge from causing economic damage | Moving water around is costly and inefficient. Moving water around and building retention ponds, dikes, and other water containment structures can rob ecological systems of water flows they naturally require. |
|  | 2) Use markets to distribute and ensure clean water | Markets advantage water uses with higher economic value, and can disadvantage less-well-off rural areas, traditional industries like farming, and healthy natural areas. |
|  | 3) Create accessible information to guide water decisions | This is an expensive undertaking that doesn’t guarantee that the results will be used properly to address the issue.  |
|  | 4) Expand local control of water allocation | This could create or exacerbate regional advantages within states. |
|  | 5) Clarify existing water rights systems so it is clear who gets to use water | Many water rights systems are very old and strict, and should be reworked entirely rather than tinkered with, even if it means upending longstanding systems. |
|  | 6) Use education to promote voluntary action to reduce waste and pollution | Relying on voluntary action is a slow and uncertain pathway to protecting water resources. |
|  | 7) Develop new water sources where water is needed | This would allow development to continue, even in places where the resources don’t exist to support it. |
|  | 8) Encourage public/private partnerships to provide clean water. | Clean water is a public good that we should not let economic interests drive the market. |