

Analysis of the 2007-2012 Water Plan & the 2030 Water Agenda

This spring, the Mexican National Water Commission (Conagua) presented additional details about its 2030 Water Agenda, a program that establishes the water-related objectives for the next 20 years in order to create a sustainable water strategy and to ensure that future administrations recognize the water sector as a strategic priority. This agenda will have for pillars: rivers free from trash, universal potable water coverage, 100% treated wastewater, and adequate protection and long term plans for all populations vulnerable to flooding.

Before analyzing the long term goals of the 2030 Water Agenda, it is important and prudent to analyze the current short-to-medium term Calderon Administration's five year (2007-2012) Water Plan.

Details of the 2007-2012 Mexico Water Plan

At the beginning of the six-year Calderon administration in 2006, plans began for a comprehensive infrastructure program with a significant focus on water and a 20-year water agenda. Later that year the President released his five-year Water Plan. The plan is intended to improve insufficient and lagging public water infrastructure, allowing Mexico to catch up with advancing Latin American countries. Mexico ranked 64th in the world on the Infrastructure Index of Competitiveness, compared to Chile at 35th and Panama at 46th. A second, more long-term goal is to get Mexico into the ranks of developed economies such as South Korea (21), Spain (22), Malaysia (23), and Ireland (31) by 2030.

The 2007-2012 Plan has eight general objectives. Each one of these general objectives has 5-10 specific, measurable, operational strategies. This was something fairly novel for the water sector and for Mexican government entities in general. Many of these strategies have multiple components and require periodic reports to demonstrate progress. The objectives are to:

1. Improve water productivity in the agricultural sector;
2. Increase the access and quality of potable water, sanitation, and sewage systems;
3. Promote the integral and sustainable management of river basins and aquifers;
4. Improve the technical, administrative, and financial development of the sector;
5. Consolidate the participation of end-users and society in the management of water and the promotion of appropriate water use and water culture development;
6. Prevent risks derived from storms and heavy rainfall and deal with their effects;

7. Evaluate the effects of climate change in the water cycle in the country; and
8. Create a tax-paying water culture and promote compliance with the National Water Law.

The Plan has four specific and concrete goals for 2012 (related to the second objective above):

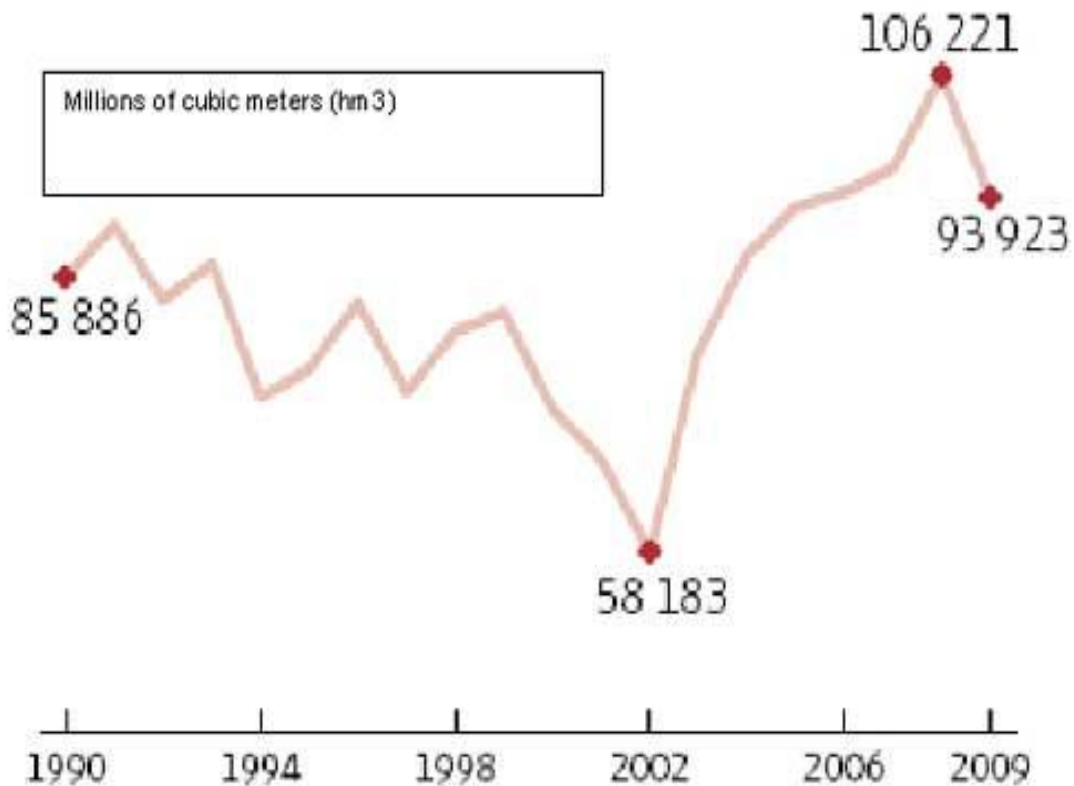
1. Increase potable water coverage to 92% nationwide,
2. Increase sanitary/sewage coverage to 88% nationwide,
3. Increase wastewater treatment coverage to 60% nationwide, and
4. Increase the level of efficiency in 80 local water utilities by 8%.

Some might say that these goals are lofty, especially considering that while 97% of urban areas have access to potable water, only 76% of the rural areas have such access; while 96% of the urban areas have access to sanitation/sewer systems, only 63% of the rural areas have similar access; and while about 33-40% of the wastewater is currently treated in the country, only 10% of the wastewater in the Greater Mexico City area and 0% of the wastewater in the Greater Guadalajara area are currently treated. The competitiveness of Mexico's water and sewage systems is considered to be 20% below the Latin American average, well below Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia and just below severely underinfrastructure Peru.

Details of the 2030 Mexico Water Agenda

The Water Agenda 2030 was announced with the five-year plan. However, it was not until a few months ago that the plan truly began to take shape. Even more importantly, the concrete strategies for the agenda will be determined later this year as Conagua interacts with government, NGO, and business interests to obtain ideas and suggestions for approaches and technologies. In this way, Conagua hopes to construct a platform that will establish the necessary procedures to strengthen the water sector to comply with still unfulfilled 2012 goals as well as the still unspecified long term 2030 strategies.

The Water Agenda 2030 is still in its initial stages in terms of having measurable strategies. However, the following graph illustrates the goals that it hopes to reach:



The general goal for the 2030 Agenda is for Mexico to become one of the 20 most advanced countries in the water sector according to the Index. Its specific and optimistic goals to date are the following:

- By 2015, all river basins will be in equilibrium, all irrigation automated, and all treated water reused;
- By 2016, all major populated areas will be free from risk of flood;
- By 2024, all rural areas will have access to potable water;
- By 2025, all industrial wastewater will be treated; and
- By 2030, all aquifers will be in equilibrium and the diverse sources of contamination will be under control.

With the still lingering international economic crisis, the 2012 Mexican presidential elections, the traditional Mexican political environment and realities, the lack of a significantly increased revenue stream, and the fact that Mexican consumers consider water to be a mere commodity, it is difficult if not impossible to know if these goals will be met. However, in light of the extent of the problems and their urgency, and the evidence of a new, apolitical commitment to water infrastructure issues, Mexican government commitment to resolving these problems will continue to move forward and is almost irreversible.