

Title:

An Overview of the Water Management Cross-Cut Plan for Commercialization of America's Unconventional Fuels

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The increasing dependence of the United States on foreign energy resources, and the associated economic and security vulnerabilities, dictate that the nation must produce more petroleum at home. To facilitate development, the Congress in the Energy Policy Act of 2005, directed the Secretary of Energy to establish a Task Force to "...develop a program to coordinate and accelerate the commercial development of strategic unconventional fuels." The task force identified water resource stewardship as a key challenge for bringing unconventional fossil resources on-line to help secure the energy future for the United States. A Water Resources Cross-Cut Plan prepared for an Office of Petroleum Reserves Report seeks to assure adequate water supplies to support industry development, community needs, and future water demand, to protect surface and groundwater quality and to protect existing water rights. To harvest these new resources, industry must shift to new processes and to new locations, both of which affect the nature and magnitude of impacts to water resources. Within the U.S., shale-oil constitutes a substantial portion of this unconventional resource. However, development of these energy resources, which promises to increase the nation's energy security, could also impact water resources. If these impacts are not adequately understood and managed, commercial-scale development of the energy resources may be constrained. Careful and thoughtful management of water issues, which occurs in parallel with the scale-up of industry operations, will ensure protection and conservation of water and full development of unconventional energy resources.

The Water Resources Cross-Cut Plan evaluates potential practices that will help decision makers address: surface and groundwater quality, rights and flows; water disposal, recycling and treatment; climate induced variations in water supply and demand; process water handling and reuse, impacts to water from new infrastructure; energy generation; and long-term impacts after site abandonment. This paper describes the goals, objectives, strategies and proposed activities required to protect water resources while accelerating the commercial development of strategic unconventional fuels.

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