

Frequently Asked Questions about the Water Budget Handbook

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) has released the Handbook for Water Budget Development: With or Without Models¹ (Water Budget Handbook). DWR developed the Water Budget Handbook to provide the California water resources community with a resource to help inform the development of water budgets for any geographic area and time period, using modeling, and non-modeling approaches alike. This handbook is not intended to be used as a prescriptive method of water budget analysis but rather a tool and inventory of information to aid in development of water budgets.

The following frequently asked questions provide clarification about use of the Water Budget Handbook.

1. What is the Water Budget Handbook?

The Water Budget Handbook provides a catalog of methods that can be used when developing a water budget, along with considerations for which methods to choose based on the basin setting, needs, availability of data and tools, and case studies which show the application of specific methods.

2. Are Groundwater Sustainability Agencies required to use the methods described in the Water Budget Handbook to develop water budgets for their Groundwater Sustainability Plans?

No. The Water Budget Handbook does not prescribe methods an agency should use. Rather, it provides a catalog of methods that an agency may consider based on their expertise, data availability, and need(s). The Water Budget Handbook does not take the place of the BMP or the Groundwater Sustainability Plan Regulations.

3. Will DWR use the Water Budget Handbook to check the water budgets submitted as part of Groundwater Sustainability Plans?

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Office (SGMO) within DWR may use any published information, including the Water Budget Handbook, when evaluating and assessing Groundwater

¹ <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Groundwater-Management/Data-and-Tools> (under Reports tab)

Sustainability Plans. However, the Handbook does not define standards to which plans must necessarily adhere.

4. Will following the methods provided in the Water Budget Handbook guarantee approval of Groundwater Sustainability Plans?

No. While the Water Budget Handbook describes methods a Groundwater Sustainability Agency may use to estimate water budgets, following that guidance does not guarantee approval of the resulting Groundwater Sustainability Plan.

5. What methods are described in the Water Budget Handbook and how they are selected?

The Water Budget Handbook describes a suite of methods for estimating water budget components of the land system, the surface water system, and the groundwater system. These methods were selected from a review of existing hydrology literature. This suite of methods is not all encompassing and may not include all available methods for estimating each water budget component.

6. Does the Water Budget Handbook cover both modeling and non-modeling approaches to develop water budgets?

Yes. It provides a decision tree to streamline selection of a modeling or a non-modeling approach for water budget development.

7. Does DWR endorse a modeling approach versus a non-modeling approach for developing a water budget?

No. DWR does not endorse one approach over another. The choice of which approach to use when developing a water budget will vary throughout the state and is dependent on multiple factors.

8. What is the purpose of the case studies included in the Water Budget Handbook?

The case studies for the modeling and non-modeling approaches are included only as practical examples of applying the methods and models presented in the Water Budget Handbook.

9. What is the purpose of the Data Resources Directory included in the Water Budget Handbook?

The Data Resources Directory provides an organized inventory of information which may be relevant to the development of a water budget. Note that the inventory of these resources, while extensive, is not all-inclusive. Additionally, some resources may be duplicative, covering the same information but in different formats or time scales. Users of the Water Budget Handbook are responsible for independently verifying and understanding the applicability of the information provided.

10. What value do the guidance and methods presented in the Water Budget Handbook provide to resource managers?

Resource managers and other stakeholders may use the guidance and methods presented in the Water Budget Handbook to inform water resources planning studies and to assess management strategies in their area of interest. Additional guidance and methods beyond those discussed in the handbook may be required for developing water budgets to support decision making.

11. Does following the methods in the Water Budget Handbook satisfy the requirements for a water right application?

The handbook is not being put forward as a means to satisfy the requirements for a water right application. The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) administers California's water rights system and any questions regarding what information is necessary to successfully apply for a water right should be addressed directly to the SWRCB.

12. How frequently will the Water Budget Handbook be updated?

The public review draft of the Water Budget Handbook was released on February 7, 2020. The final release of the Water Budget Handbook, which will include revisions to the handbook based on comments received during the 60-day comment period, will occur in the summer of 2020. DWR will continue to collect feedback from local agencies and other stakeholders and plans to update the handbook as necessary.

Subscribe to our listserv² to stay up-to-date on the latest information about the Water Budget Handbook, including future workshops and webinars. Contact us at cwpc@water.ca.gov if you have additional questions.

² Subscribe to the Water Plan listserv at: https://listservice.cnra.ca.gov/scripts/wa.exe?SUBED1=DWR_CWP_ENEWS&A=1