

Jordan Lake One Water

5-Year Strategic Action Plan (2025-2030)



June 2025

Report prepared by:

Elizabeth Schuster, Environmental Economist
Sustainable Economies Consulting, LLC



Debbie Mans, Principal
TWENTYTWENTY public affairs

TWENTYTWENTY
public affairs



Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Executive Summary	3
The Process.....	3
JLOW Governance	4
JLOW Committees	4
PLACE-BASED INVESTMENTS	6
DATA.....	7
POLICY.....	8
OUTREACH & EDUCATION.....	8
ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.....	9
JLOW Action Plan by Year	10
YEAR 1 PRIORITIES.....	11
PRIORITIES FOR YEARS 2-5 OF THE 5-YEAR ACTION PLAN	12
ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	16
Conclusion	16

Executive Summary

Jordan Lake One Water (JLOW) is a coalition that represents local governments, conservation groups, universities, water utilities, agriculture, state agencies, private industry partners, and residents. JLOW seeks to collaborate with all those interested in realizing watershed-wide environmental, societal, and economic benefits, while sharing the costs of water quality and quantity improvements.

This strategic action plan supports the implementation of the three pillars of the JLOW vision for communities, ecosystems and the economy. The plan was developed through a collaborative process with opportunities for input from the full membership. The process was founded on evidence-based perspectives and used a criteria-based approach for ranking priorities.

Key actions for year 1 include:

1. Launch robust, functioning committees.
2. Maintain engagement with the rulemaking process to ensure JLOW can be a compliance organization.
3. Provide guidance to DWR on development of funding formula for investment requirements of permittee members.
4. Create a 2–3-year budget to meet full JLOW needs.
5. Develop a communications plan to build JLOW membership.

This action plan provides details on a committee structure that aligns strategically to drive longer-term goals, as well as year 1 implementation priorities and key decisions, actions and milestones for years 2 through 5. This five-year action was officially launched in July 2025.

The Process

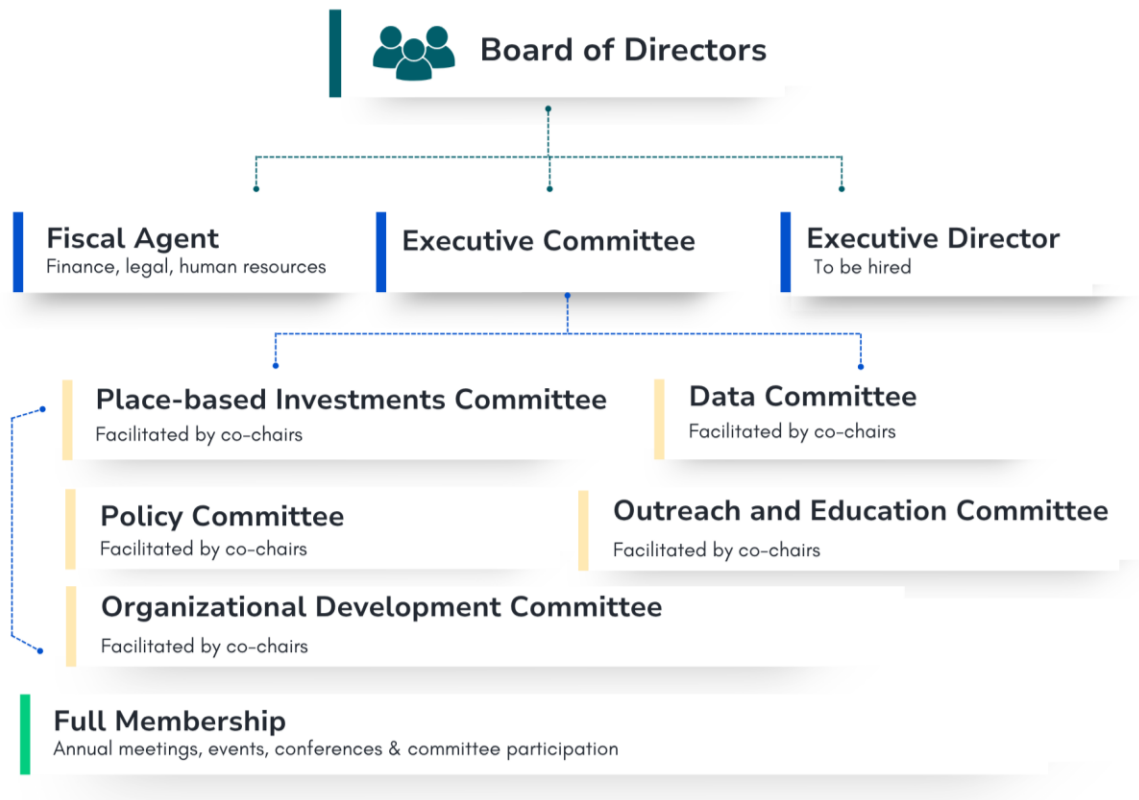
The strategic planning process built upon the “A One Water Vision for the Jordan Lake Watershed” document, which was completed in September 2021. A Strategic Plan Workgroup was created from a subset of JLOW Board members. The workgroup retained a team of consultants to design and facilitate the action planning process. The process took place from December 2024 through July 2025 and was divided into 4 phases:

- Phase 1: Assessment, where the consultants collected input from 30 stakeholders and compiled the findings in a summary report.
- Phase 2: Initial Priorities, where the consultants facilitated an in-person, 1-day retreat to refine the findings from phase 1. We established five long-term strategies (with a 5–10-year time horizon) and five 1-year priorities.
- Phase 3: Creating the Action Plan, which is the development and finalization of this report. This phase also includes assigning ownership to actions and building out the two-five-year priorities.

- Phase 4: Launch, which means ensuring that the JLOW team has clear guidance and tools to be able to successfully implement the action plan.

JLOW Governance

Jordan Lake One Water Governance



The JLOW Executive Committee, Board of Directors, and Committees use consensus-based decision making. The 5-finger scale:

1. Enthusiastic support – “I will champion the motion”
2. Modest support – “I like the motion”
3. Neutral position – “I can live with the motion but without enthusiasm”
4. No support – “I don’t like the motion and need to state my opposition”
5. STOP! Active resistance – “I will work against the motion”

There is a work-in-progress Governance Guidance document that further explains the current governance structure and recommended updates.

JLOW Committees

JLOW has designed a set of 5–10-year strategies to guide their work. It is of utmost importance that strategies align one-to-one with JLOW committee structure. This ensures that the organizational structure is designed with strategic impact in mind.

These strategies were developed based upon input from Phases 1 and 2 in this action planning process, while also ensuring that they are aligned with the organization's long-term vision. The table below shows who committees contribute to long-term JLOW goals. *Please note: "Become a compliance organization" is not a stand-alone committee. Rather, the critical actions were placed in the committee where the necessary stakeholder expertise will exist to move them forward.*

Jordan Lake One Water long-term goals	
Long-term goals	How 5-Year Action Plan supports the long-term goals
Goal 1 (Environmental) – To improve the hydrological and ecological function of the Jordan Lake Watershed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Place-based Investments to be prioritized for measurable water quality benefits ● Data shows success around both water quality & conservation outcomes ● Policy to support evidence-based approaches to improving environmental outcomes ● Outreach and Education to include messaging on ecological outcomes with an emphasis on water quality ● Organizational Development to support cross-committee coordination as well as funding for environmental outcomes.
Goal 2 (Societal) – To enhance the health, vitality, and well-being of all residents and communities within the Jordan Lake Watershed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Place-based Investments to be selected collaboratively with communities, taking into consideration community needs. ● Data shows success in terms of select quality of life improvements ● Policy takes into consideration human well-being ● Outreach and Education to include messaging around benefits that are relevant to each community ● Organizational Development to support cross-committee coordination that supports community quality of life.
Goal 3 (Economic) – To foster a robust, prosperous, and viable economy in the Jordan Lake Watershed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cost-effectiveness and return on investment to be considered when selecting locations and practices for place-based Investments. ● Data committee to increase access to data on cost-effectiveness and return on investment for a range of management options. ● Policy to support JLOW's role as a compliance organization which will lead to better outcomes, more choice, and cost-neutrality. ● Outreach and Education to include messaging on economic benefits to projects and well as continuing to collaborate with key economic partners including developers and farmers. ● Organizational Development to support cross-committee coordination that considers economic outcomes.

Here's an overview:

- **Committee Name:** Place-based Investments
 - *Description:* Advancing on-the-ground projects that meaningfully benefit ecosystems & communities
- **Committee Name:** Data
 - *Description:* Data and information hub to show & inform watershed wide progress
- **Committee Name:** Policy
 - *Description:* Influence & advance policies and regulations at state and local levels to support One Water approaches.
- **Committee Name:** Outreach & Education
 - *Description:* Building relationships, education & communications, and membership
- **Committee Name:** Organizational Development
 - *Description:* Organizational and operational development, budget & resources to make JLOW a functioning and sustainable organization.

These strategies and related committees build on the vision set forth in the **One Water Vision for the Jordan Lake Watershed Report** (September 2021).

The following subsections describe the committees in more detail, including goals and proposed actions.

PLACE-BASED INVESTMENTS

Description: Advancing place-based investments that meaningfully benefit ecosystems & communities

Long-term purpose & objectives:

- The water quality of Jordan Lake is substantially improved because of JLOW and its members, and if feasible is no longer impaired.
- Municipalities in the watershed have invested in extra-jurisdictional projects that provide measurable water quality benefits.
- Conservation priorities include increased protection of agricultural lands with highest conservation value in addition to other best practices including stream buffers, ecological restoration, land acquisition and green infrastructure for stormwater management.
- The policy committee creates a recommendation to the full board for an investment level in projects that drives significant ecology improvements in the watershed while supporting a triple bottom line.
- Ensure that investment is going to a suite of water quality projects that provide multiple benefits to ecosystems and communities.

- All JLOW members have made positive progress toward reducing excessive and polluted water returned to the rivers and are minimizing water withdrawals.

Example actions that fit within this committee:

- Generate an initial list of implemented projects by JLOW members.
- Get grant funding for an innovative pilot project to showcase what JLOW can do using the One Water model.
- Identify and prioritize practices and projects that will improve the living conditions of local residents.
- Explore opportunities for pooled funding and funding applications/proposals.
- Finalize the JLOW process for selecting projects (using the weak links analysis and identifying 5-6 parameters for selection) and creating a simple, user-friendly tool for applying this process. Determine if this process also includes support with site selection.
- Reach out to developers to involve them in economic discussion about which projects are beneficial to both the community and themselves.

DATA

Description: Data and information hub to show & inform watershed wide progress

Long-term purpose & objectives:

- JLOW is the catalyst that shows progress & demonstrates success, facilitating data on ecological, community, and economic outcomes that come from watershed-wide improvements to water quality.
- All local governments and NPDES permittees are implementing impactful management strategies aimed at protecting overall ecological health while also achieving nutrient reduction.
- Identify existing water quality data sources from partners, organize & prioritize the most relevant data, and create a plan for sharing and/or targeted reporting of that data.
- Meet data reporting requirements of the Jordan Lake Rules and/or permit(s) for being a compliance organization.

Example actions that fit within this committee:

- Gather information on JLOW member financial commitment levels for improving water resources.
- Develop a system for storing and sharing data compiled by JLOW.
- Act as a clearinghouse of information and resources.
- Function as the body to report to public and private audiences the business case for JLOW investments aimed at improving water quality.

- Determine how members can track efficiency/savings.

POLICY

Description: Influence & advance policies and regulations at state and local levels to support One Water approaches.

Long-term purpose & objectives:

- Investment-centered rules are adopted (and re-adopted).
- NC DEQ / DWR recognizes JLOW as a compliance organization that is stable and capable of meeting nutrient requirements.
- JLOW has bridged the gap between state regulators and regulated entities.
- Investment amounts are impactful as well as equitable sustainable for regulated communities.
- Local governments gain regulatory compliance for development while still protecting and restoring the ecology of the watershed.
- JLOW's support means all local governments have ordinances and incentives that advance One Water solutions for water management.
- JLOW continues to serve as an organized group to influence rules and regulations with a shared voice.

Example actions that fit within this committee:

- Partner with UNC School of Government to develop JLOW approved model ordinances.
- Provide continued guidance on the development of Jordan Lake nutrient rule language.
- Inclusion of compliance or implementation organization option and clear list of power and authorities under any legislation or regulations.
- Engage communities to help them modernize their land use planning ordinances or to rethink community zoning and landscaping requirements.
- Ensure Rules are not an excessive obstacle for development while still protecting and restoring the ecology of the watershed.

OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Description: Building relationships, education & communications, and membership.

Long-term purpose & objectives:

- Greater public acceptance of JLOW member investments occurs because JLOW communicates the economic, quality of life, and environmental benefits in terms meaningful to the general public.
- The general public recognizes the value of all types of waters in the Jordan Lake Watershed and supports cost-effective measures to protect them.

- JLOW has the increased membership and participation needed to be sustainable, including a variety of members that represent local and state government, universities, private sector partners, nonprofit organizations and residents.
- All 25 cities and towns in the watershed are members of JLOW including some that are not required to participate.

Example actions that fit within this committee:

- Identify under-resourced communities and develop relationships with them to better understand their needs to be able to develop future projects collaboratively with them.
- Create a region-wide campaign on projects and provide a toolkit for communities to use to educate residents.
- Target messages & stories to the community regarding the value of water, benefits to communities, and impacts of individual actions.
- Use an equity lens when engaging communities.
- Engage businesses, developers, homeowners associations, and building associations to collaboratively develop strategies with them.
- Public-facing targeted outreach (via town halls, social media, and by sharing successful projects).

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Description: Organizational and operational development, budget & resources to make JLOW a functioning and sustainable organization.

Long-term purpose & objectives:

- JLOW is run by an executive director sustainably funded from member dues.
- JLOW has the applicable legal & organization structures to be able to be both a compliance organization for permittees and a member organization for the greater One Water vision.
- JLOW has the organizational structure to support all local governments seeking to be members of JLOW.
- JLOW has active and functioning committees with a clear mandate and healthy governance structure.
- JLOW has a sustainable budget with executed projects.

Example actions that fit within this committee:

- Draft job description and hire an executive director who can then work on funding opportunities, organizational development, and executing on JLOW's vision.
- Transition to less reliance on COG and member organizations for the day-to-day operations of JLOW.
- Ensure staff and organizational capacity to work on goals.

- Develop operating procedures for how JLOW members and committees, individually and in partnerships make decisions around a variety of areas (investment, data collection, policy, etc.).
- Develop leadership and committee structure, based on JLOW Action Plan.
- Develop the organizational structure needed to support a compliance organization (e.g., is this a separate entity with its own bylaws?).
- Review the current budget and revise to meet Action Plan goals.

JLOW Action Plan by Year

The estimated annual timeline is shown below. This shows when key activities would need to happen to be in alignment both with bylaws and budget cycles.

Timeline	Key Activity
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New members start & onboarded • New officers to start in Executive Committee • JLOW Budget finalized
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committees start working on updating 2-year priorities (for a July 1 start date for any new priorities)
March	
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committees finalize annual priorities and draft 2nd year priorities
May	
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Governments adopt new budgets in June
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July marks the start of each July to June JLOW fiscal year • July also marks the planning cycle for annual priorities • Executive Committee to review annual priorities in July each year and review proposed expenses related to any new year 2 priorities
August	
September	
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an early, initial draft budget - if a dues increase is expected, communicate this as early as possible • New member outreach
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New member outreach • Fall annual meeting where Board of Directors is elected • Board of Directors appoints Executive Committee
December	

YEAR 1 PRIORITIES

This section outlines details on year 1 priorities as well as key decisions, actions & milestones for years 2-5. Important note: JLOW operates on a July-June fiscal year. At the end of each fiscal year, the priorities for the coming year should be reassessed and re-prioritized.

The criteria used to rank year 1 priorities in terms of importance is as follows:

1. Urgency / external timeline exists / Critical path element – that it must be done before other needs can be addressed. If we don't do it now, we can't do a, b or c
2. Feasibility & practicality– can it get done (staffing & member availability)
3. Capacity increase –does this help JLOW increase its ability to function
4. Impact to advance JLOW vision

It was determined that only Policy, Outreach & Education, and Organizational Development Committees will launch in year 1. On-the-ground projects & Data Committees will launch in year 2 of the action plan.

COMMITTEE	ACTION OR KEY DECISION	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain engagement with the rulemaking process to ensure JLOW can be a compliance organization• Provide guidance to DWR on development of funding formula for investment requirements of permittee members.	DAVID & TREVOR
Outreach & Education	Develop a communications plan with a focus on consistent messaging and clear goals to build JLOW membership. This includes relationship mapping, clearly defining the target audience and executing the plan. While year 1 focuses solely on new members as a target audience, the communications plan will serve as the foundation for future communications as well.	LIZ JOHNSON
Organizational Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure successful launch of executive committee as well as Policy, Outreach and Education, and Organizational Development committees - estimated launch July 2025.• Establish governance, roles, decision making processes (between committees and Board) for robust, functioning committees.• Create a 2-3 year budget to meet full JLOW needs (executive director, consultants, and back office needs for a functioning organization).	PETER & KRISTINE

PRIORITIES FOR YEARS 2-5 OF THE 5-YEAR ACTION PLAN

PLACE-BASED INVESTMENTS			
High priority actions and key decisions	Year	Secondary priorities	Year
Launch the Place-based Investments Committee, assign co-chairs, recruit members, and schedule a recurring monthly (or bi-monthly) meeting time.	2	Develop a strategy for projects led by JLOW versus projects led by others but supported or enhanced by JLOW	3
Generate an initial list of implemented projects by JLOW members	2	Obtain grant funding for an innovative pilot project to showcase what JLOW can do using the One Water model	3
Finalization of a user-friendly tool for project selection	2	Create design and start construction of the pilot project	4
Develop a process for continuing to track new projects over time	3	Develop a strategy for projects within the agricultural community	3

DATA

High priority actions or key decisions	Year	Secondary priorities	Year
Launch the Data committee, assign co-chairs, recruit members, and schedule a recurring monthly (or bi-monthly) meeting time.	2	Identify existing water quality data sources from partners, organize & prioritize the most relevant data, and create a plan for sharing and/or targeted reporting of that data that shows watershed trends.	2
Establish criteria for categories of data needs, including how existing data will be considered (QA/QC process, citizen science, etc.). Include criteria on scale (does it need to be the entire watershed is it more about project data – or both?)	2	Committee to review and answer a list of open questions that include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Which organizations already are collecting watershed monitoring data? 2. What data is already being collected? 3. What is the most efficient and user-friendly way for JLOW to aggregate and share that data? 4. What gaps exist in the data? 5. What is JLOW's plan for filling those gaps (what, when and which partners would collect the missing data)? 6. Does JLOW have any requirements around monitoring for projects and if so, what might they be? 	2-3
Create a system for collecting and sharing data on permittee projects in conjunction with NCDEQ to ensure the proper data verification process	2		

POLICY

High priority actions or key decisions	Year	Secondary priorities	Year
<p>At the end of year 1, assess progress made on the Rules process.</p> <p>1. Has this been established: Inclusion of compliance or implementation organization option and clear list of power and authorities under any legislation or regulations</p> <p>2. Which organizational structure does JLOW need moving forward to support a compliance organization? Once determined, the Policy Committee will make a recommendation to the Organizational Management Committee to implement any structural changes to JLOW.</p> <p>3. If the Rule has not been updated, identify policy priorities for year 2.</p>	2	Partner with existing groups (e.g., UNC School of Government or other watersheds, such as High Rock Lake Watershed) to gather and promote JLOW approved model ordinances.	2
Establish requirements in the Rules for regulating existing and new development.	3	Engage communities to help them modernize their land use planning ordinances or to rethink community zoning and landscaping requirements	3

OUTREACH & EDUCATION

High priority actions or key decisions	Year	Secondary priorities	Year
Based upon campaign in year one, successfully onboard x new members. Ensure there exists a clear member onboarding process and that members understand JLOW vision & expectations.	2	Public facing targeted outreach (via town halls, social media, and by sharing successful projects).	2
Development of communication materials taking into consideration key messages, different audiences, & delivery methods.	2	Engage businesses, developers and building associations. Collaboratively develop strategies with them.	2
Identify under-resourced communities and develop relationships with them to better understand their needs to be able to develop future projects collaboratively with them.	3	Target messages & stories to the community regarding the value of water, benefits to communities, and impacts of individual actions	3
		Create a region-wide campaign on projects and provide a toolkit for communities to use to educate residents	4

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT			
High priority actions or key decisions	Year	Secondary priorities	Year
The consultants will share an example template of what good committee structure is. The Organizational Development committee should update the document to reflect what good committee structure looks like for JLOW. This includes ongoing coordination & communication across committees, as well as launching an executive committee.	1-2	Develop a plan to transition to less reliance on COG	2
Onboard executive director and develop a governance structure for decision making between ED, Board and Committees	2	Ensure staff and organizational capacity to work on goals	2
Develop the organizational and fiscal structure needed to support a compliance organization (e.g. is this a separate entity with its own bylaws?). Aim to hire an executive director before this happens – this would be an important action for the ED to lead.	2-3	Develop operating procedures for how JLOW members, individually and in partnerships, can obtain feedback on the strategies and practices being considered for investment	2
After Rules or legislation is passed enabling JLOW to be a compliance organization, an application needs to be submitted and a permit obtained to implement group permit through the compliance organization.	4		

Conclusion

In conclusion, this strategic action plan uses a collaborative and systematic approach that empowers JLOW to realize watershed-wide environmental, societal, and economic outcomes while specifically supporting the JLOW vision for communities, ecosystems and the economy. This action plan provides details on year 1 implementation as well as outlines the key decisions, actions and milestones for years 2 through 5 in order to realize JLOW's mission while staying true to purpose.