



2. Public Involvement

Public participation is an important component of the Mora-San Miguel-Guadalupe water planning effort. This section describes the public participation process used in developing this regional water plan and provides the public welfare statement that was developed as part of the public process.

2.1 Public Participation

Water planning efforts in the region are overseen by a steering committee that has representation from:

- County government
- Municipalities
- Acéquias
- Community water systems
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- State and federal environmental, agricultural, and forestry agency representatives
- United World College and New Mexico Highlands University
- Several representatives from the public, including agricultural and watershed interests

The Mora-San Miguel-Guadalupe Water Planning Region Steering Committee oversees all aspects of the regional water planning process and has been active in development of this report. Steering Committee meetings are held approximately quarterly. A total of 10 Steering Committee meetings have been held since this phase of water planning was initiated in early 2003. All Steering Committee meetings are advertised and are open to the public, and citizens that attend either a Steering Committee or public meeting can sign up for a mailing list to be informed of all future water planning efforts.

In addition to the Steering Committee meetings, public meetings to present water planning information and to solicit input on alternatives were held throughout the region, including the communities of Mora, Las Vegas, Pecos, and Santa Rosa. All public meetings were advertised.



A media contact list and example meeting notice, as well as notes from all the meetings, are provided in Appendix C.

In addition to the Steering Committee and public meetings, public involvement in the regional water planning process is facilitated by providing access to the water plan in public locations, including libraries and/or government offices in each county, and on the internet (www.dbstephens.com). Also, fact sheets on water supply, water demand, population projections, and legal issues were prepared and distributed at public meetings and Steering Committee meetings.

2.2 Public Welfare

In 1987, the New Mexico legislature amended a number of water statutes to give the State Engineer authority to deny an application for a new water right or a water right transfer if it is contrary to conservation of water or detrimental to the public welfare of the state. The legislature did not define public welfare, nor has the OSE or the ISC. However, a definition of public welfare, adopted by a region could provide the OSE guidance in processing water rights applications. Should a proposed water right application appear to be contrary to a regionally defined public welfare criterion, the OSE could potentially rely on this criterion to deny or place a condition on the application. In this way, the public welfare statement is a potential mechanism for protecting regional values.

The Steering Committee considered potential public welfare statements and adopted an initial statement that was published in the *Draft Regional Water Plan*. Following publication of the draft plan, a subcommittee of the Steering Committee was formed to further develop the statement, and input was solicited from the entire steering committee and stakeholder list. Comments received as a result of this process were integrated, resulting in the attached definition of public welfare for the planning region.



Public Welfare Statement for the Mora-San Miguel-Guadalupe Water Planning Region

Water is the lifeblood of the communities of the Mora-San Miguel-Guadalupe Water Planning Region. Within the region, traditional communities and acéquias have ancient water traditions and systems of governance that have an intrinsic value to the region for their cultural, social, historical, and ecological significance. All communities in the region are interdependent and share the vision of a sustainable water future in which water policies reflect the values of the region.

All communities in the region share the principle that demands from outside the Mora-San Miguel-Guadalupe region should not be met by transferring water rights out of the region. Water rights should remain in the region for use by communities within the region for both economic and ecological sustainability.

Rural villages and community acéquias are the foundation for current and future efforts to build sustainable food systems. All communities in the region will benefit from efforts to promote local agricultural uses of water and to ensure that new uses of water do not impair the ability of future generations to grow their food locally. The people of the region seek to promote and protect agriculture by preventing the severance of water rights for agricultural lands. In addition, the communities of the region will strive to protect water supplies through appropriate use of water for agricultural, domestic, community, commercial, and recreational uses.

Water quality in the region should be protected and enhanced for the benefit of all the communities and ecosystems of the region. Various local governments should cooperate to ensure that the people of the region have access to a healthy water supply and should create educational opportunities to enhance the knowledge of communities about water resources, conservation, and the overall importance of the resource.

Within the region, the cultural value of water as a community resource remains strong. Water is not a commodity that should be exploited for short-term gain, but is an essential element of all life that should be protected in perpetuity. If changes in water use are necessary over time, those changes should reflect decisions made from a cultural and spiritual connection to place, in consideration of the fundamental values and principles of communities in which the changes are taking place, with all due respect for our neighbors, and in consultation with other governing bodies. In addition to the principles articulated herein, the public welfare can be further defined by the policies adopted by community acéquias that reflect their values and concerns.

Protecting and ensuring adequate water supplies for current residents, businesses, agricultural uses, recreation, and environmental sustainability can be further accomplished by:

- Requiring hydrological reports as a pre-requisite for new development
- Developing ordinances for appropriate development density
- Developing infrastructure that protects water quality and the environment
- Creating incentives for water conservation
- Improving monitoring and metering of water uses so that water resources can be more effectively managed to ensure efficient use of water
- Supporting intergovernmental cooperation to address water quality and public health
- Encouraging community water and wastewater systems where appropriate

The connection between land, water, and the people of the region has sustained our culture since the first settlements, and our future depends on keeping those connections strong. Water is a vital link, which if severed from the land will also fragment our people from their land. Water is not just a commodity to be bought and sold or exploited for short-term gain; the allocation of our limited water resources must recognize that traditional subsistence, agricultural, and grazing activities are vital to the cultural integrity and ecological sustainability of the region and should not be subordinated by other types of "more profitable" land uses. Decisions about water in our region should ensure that a healthy environment and social and economic justice go hand in hand.