



COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

REGIONAL WATER PLAN · RIO CHAMA WATERSHED

CHAPTER 2

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CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The first step in the water planning process in Region 14 was the establishment of a Citizens' Advisory Committee. The Committee consists of 15 members drawn from throughout the study area and selected because of their interest and involvement in both community and water issues. Members' names and communities are listed below.

The Committee, and many other interested residents, participated in a workshop led by New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission and Western Network staff on July 18, 1995 to become familiar with the process of regional water planning as administered by the Commission. Following the workshop, four more Council meetings were held between October of 1995 and February of 1996 to identify common concerns about water in our region, and to set the agenda for the technical work to be done to support the initial planning phase. Key concerns that surfaced throughout the discussions included:

- infrastructure for providing adequate domestic water supplies, sewage treatment to prevent ground water contamination, and fire protection;
- related land use and development issues;
- preservation of existing acequias and the role they play in communities, along with fostering improvements in agriculture to take better advantage of the water provided by the acequia systems;
- timing of available irrigation water does not always coincide with periods of maximum need;
- provision of water for future industrial and/or non-traditional agricultural expansion; and
- water for recreational needs, both stream and reservoir-based recreation, and for facilities such as swimming pools for local communities.

Because of the rural nature of the planning region and the dispersion of our population, a good deal of the public outreach for water planning took the form of personal communication with people known to be interested and active in water issues. This included personal contacts in their communities by Advisory Committee members and other informal networking. The Advisory Committee has continued to meet occasionally as the Water Plan has taken shape, along with a great deal of work reviewing drafts of Water Plan chapters and technical information that has been done by subcommittees of the Advisory Committee.

The Citizens' Advisory Committee:

Karl Bode	Abiquiu
Frank Chacon	Chamita
Andulia Davis	Dulce
Agustin Garcia	Abiquiu
Dick Lehmann	Ojo Caliente
Salomon Lovato	Coyote
Felipe Martinez	El Rito
Maryelena Martinez (Secretary)	El Rito
Randy Morfin	Coyote
Aubrey Owen	Abiquiu
Gilbert Salazar	Chamita
Leo Salazar	Coyote
Fidel Trujillo	Chamita
Uvaldo Velasquez	Coyote
Patrick Vigil	Ojo Caliente

COMMUNITY MEETINGS

In the water planning that took place between 1995 and 1997, a good deal of the effort put into public outreach took the form of personal communication with people known to be interested and active in water issues. This included personal contacts in their communities by Advisory Council members, a presentation at a board meeting of the Agua Sana community water system organization, and many other informal contacts with interested residents.

It became clear in the process of water planning that it is difficult for most people to find the time for a lengthy series of public meetings or other commitments of time for a process like this. Experience has shown that attendance is seldom great at occasional “out-of-the-blue” public meetings to discuss water issues, and follow-up attention is even more sparse. Because of these concerns, an explicit focus of the strategy adopted to maximize public awareness and participation in discussions about water planning has been to take maximum advantage of meetings and events already scheduled to make presentations and collect public input on water issues. Discussions about the water plan took place in many settings: at meetings of acequia commissioners and pariantes; at meetings held to discuss the Rio Arriba County General Plan; at public meetings held in communities around the Rio Chama watershed specifically to discuss regional water planning; and in individual meetings and other personal communication with key stakeholders such as elected officials, Rio Arriba County staff, water system operators, and acequia association officials. The public outreach process culminated with a series of meetings in Medanales, El Rito, Tierra Amarilla, and Gallina coordinated with local water activists and interested individuals, who then contacted local participants to provide feedback on the information gathered by water planners and the principal needs and concerns that must be addressed by any recommended planning alternatives.

STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Because of the sparse population in our region, as well as the distances to be traveled to attend meetings and the typically independent and informal nature of political participation here, a good deal of the outreach conducted for the Water Plan took the form of informal, one-to-one con-

versations with representatives of many different groups of regional stakeholders. The principal stakeholder groups contacted at one time or another in the planning process were:

- Rio Arriba County
- Town of Chama
- Jicarilla Apache Tribe
- San Juan Pueblo
- Carson National Forest
- Santa Fe National Forest
- Bureau of Land Management, Taos Resource Area
- Corps of Engineers, Albuquerque District
- Bureau of Reclamation, Albuquerque Office
- Natural Resources Conservation Service, Chama and Española Field Offices
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Rio de Chama Acequias Association
- Acequias Norteñas
- Rio Tusas – Ojo Caliente Acequia Association
- El Rito Acequia Association
- Representatives of the Mutual Domestic associations
- Locally active environmental organizations
- Local fire departments or fire protection districts
- New Mexico Environment Department
- Rural Community Assistance Corporation
- North Central New Mexico Economic Development District

Stakeholder representatives have often participated in scheduled public meetings, but have also frequently offered comments on planning issues individually when invited, even though they could not attend the meeting itself.

CHRONOLOGY OF COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Public meetings have been held in many places and in a great variety of different venues and for different occasions in the process of developing the Water Plan, in addition to the individual or more ad-hoc conversations discussed above. In an attempt to take maximum advantage of other meetings scheduled and make the best use of peoples’ time, water planning meetings were incorporated into the schedule for public meetings taking place to collect input on Rio Arriba County’s General Plan, as well as being set up independently. The principal planning meetings held after 1997 are summarized in Table 2-1.

Meeting notes from the July and August 2003 meetings held specifically to discuss water plan issues and get feedback for recommended water plan alternatives are summarized in Appendix A. The concerns and insights gathered at these and prior public meetings and conver-

sations about water in the region are summarized below in the section on principal concerns and needs. Written comments were received from the Jicarilla Apache Tribe. Their comments, and responses to them, can be found in Appendix A.

TABLE 2-1: COMMUNITY OUTREACH MEETINGS

Date	Location	Description
July 30, 1998	Ghost Ranch	Citizens Advisory Committee meeting
Apr. 26, 2000	Tierra Amarilla	Presentation to County Commission
Sept. 6, 2001	Medanales	Water plan meeting in conjunction with General Plan
Sept. 26, 2001	Medanales	Water plan meeting in conjunction with General Plan
Nov. 29, 2001	Medanales	Water plan meeting in conjunction with General Plan
Mar. 23, 2002	La Madera	Discussion with membership meeting of Rio Vallecitos acequias
Sept. 10, 2002	El Rito	Water plan meeting in conjunction with General Plan
Sept. 22, 2002	Taos	Congreso de las Acequias meeting
Dec. 4, 2002	Tierra Amarilla	Water plan meeting in conjunction with General Plan
Jan. 28, 2003	Alcalde	Presentation to County General Plan meeting
Mar. 11, 2003	Coyote	Water plan meeting in conjunction with General Plan
June 16, 2003	Española	Discussion with Rio Arriba County acequia working group
June 24, 2003	Lindrith	Presentation and discussion with Llaves and Lindrith community water planning committee
July 15, 2003	El Rito	Meeting to discuss local Water Plan issues
July 17, 2003	Medanales	Meeting to discuss local Water Plan issues
July 29, 2003	Gallina	Meeting to discuss local Water Plan issues
July 31, 2003	Tierra Amarilla	Meeting to discuss local Water Plan issues
Aug. 12, 2003	Tierra Amarilla	Meeting to discuss local Water Plan issues
Aug. 18, 2003	Tierra Amarilla	State Water Plan meeting (regional concerns discussed and noted for regional Water Plan)
Apr. 21, 2005	Española	County Commission working session on Water Plan
Mar. 20, 2006	Ghost Ranch	Public meeting to present and discuss Water Plan
Mar. 23, 2006	Tierra Amarilla	Public meeting to present and discuss Water Plan
Mar. 23, 2006	Chama	Presentation and discussion of Water Plan with Mayor and Village administration

WRITTEN OUTREACH MATERIAL

In December of 1996 a questionnaire was prepared and mailed to 68 acequia commissioners in the planning region, asking for information on agricultural and household water use, and for their views on future water needs. Similar surveys were sent in January, 1997 to the Mutual Domestic Water Consumers' Associations, fire departments, and Forest Service district offices. This approach, however, did not succeed in sustaining widespread participation in the process over time. Beginning in about 2000, more emphasis was placed on public meetings, personal conversations, and other face-to-face outreach methods.

SUMMARY OF WRITTEN OUTREACH MATERIAL

A number of fact sheets and other written materials have also been prepared to help make water information available and understandable to residents of the region so that they could offer more informed feedback and participate more effectively in developing the Water Plan. Copies of written material are provided in Appendix A, and a summary of the material prepared and distributed is given below in Table 2-2.

TABLE 2-2: WRITTEN OUTREACH MATERIAL

Date prepared	Description and distribution
December 1996	Survey form for acequia commissioners; distributed to commissioners by direct mail to mailing list
January 1997	Survey form for Forest Service district rangers; distributed by direct mail to rangers
January 1997	Survey form to fire chiefs; distributed by direct mail
February 1997	Survey form to operators of MDWCAs; distributed by direct mail
March 1997	Survey form to land grant members; distributed by direct mail
April 1997	Summary of information gathered to date; distributed to mailing list and to meeting attendees
May 1999	Brochure explaining regional water planning and inviting participation; distributed at public meetings, acequia commission meetings, and through mailing list
February 2000	Progress report and information summary; distributed at acequia meetings and through mailing list
September 2001	Lower Chama regional fact sheet; distributed at public meetings
September 2002	El Rito regional fact sheet; distributed at public meetings
October 2002	Upper Chama regional fact sheet; distributed at public meetings
January 2003	Revised Lower Chama regional fact sheet; distributed at public meetings
February 2003	Gallina – Cañones – Puerco de Chama regional fact sheet; distributed at public meetings
June 2003	Questionnaire form to gather input on planning alternatives; distributed at public water plan meetings, by mail, and at acequia or other meetings
June 2003	RCAA newsletter explaining water planning and soliciting feedback; distributed at RCAA meeting and through membership mailing list (included questionnaire)
March 2006	Summary handout for Water Plan; distributed at public meetings and through mailing list

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

To collect input on water planning issues and focus attention on prioritizing the most important issues and concerns that the Water Plan should address, a questionnaire was developed in June of 2003 and distributed at all the local water planning meetings held in the summer of 2003, as well as being sent to the water planning mailing list and to any other individuals that expressed an interest. The respondents were asked to prioritize the following water needs using a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the most important and 10 being the least important.

- Maintain or repair the existing community water system to make sure it is reliable (without necessarily increasing its capacity).
- Expand the capacity of the community water system so that it can serve more people, or increasing the water supply available for existing users.
- Test private well water to be sure it's not contaminated.
- Provide better wastewater treatment to reduce water pollution.
- Repair or maintain particular problems with the acequias.

- Provide additional water supplies, if possible, for the acequias in your community so that they can serve existing irrigated land better.
- Make it possible to irrigate additional land.
- Find better ways to share water or collaborate among parciantes on acequias; or achieve more effective acequia governance.
- Find ways to support or assist local agriculture (such as developing better marketing, providing technical assistance, making low-cost financing available, or other help).
- Restore and/or protect upper watersheds to reduce erosion and perhaps help make stream-flow more perennial and dependable.

Approximately 500 questionnaires were distributed during the summer of 2003, and 58 were returned, for a response rate of 11.6 percent. Responses were tabulated according to the part of the planning region where respondents lived, although unfortunately the residence of 11 respondents is unknown. A complete tabulation of responses is included in Appendix A, and a summary of the relative importance given to the ten questions is provided below in Table 2-3.

TABLE 2-3: QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Issue or concern	Community ranking (1 is highest priority)				
	Upper Chama	Unknown	Gallina	El Rito	Lower Chama
1 – Maintain existing water system	8	4	2	9-10	8
2 - Expand water system	5	6	7	4	9
3 – Test private wells	10	8	8	7	7
4 – Better wastewater treatment	7	2	9	2	6
5 – Repair acequia problems	1-4	3	1	8	2
6 – More acequia water for existing fields	1-4	9	3	3	4
7 – More water to irrigate additional land	8	10	4-5	9-10	10
8 – Better acequia collaboration/governance	6	5	10	5	5
9 – Assistance for local agriculture	1-4	7	4-5	6	3
10 – Upper watershed restoration	1-4	1	6	1	1

It is interesting to note that upper watershed protection and restoration is the top priority expressed in all of the sub-region responses except the Gallina-Cañones-Puerco de Chama group (tied for first priority in the Upper Chama area). Making more irrigable land available was a low priority everywhere except the Gallina etc. area, where it was a mid-level priority. Testing private wells for contaminants was a fairly low priority in all areas. Repairing intractable acequia problems was a high priority everywhere but El Rito. Neither expanding nor maintaining community water systems was listed as the top priority anywhere, although maintenance of the existing system was the second-highest priority among Gallina-Cañones-Puerco residents.

The questionnaire also asked respondents two more general questions, and provided room for additional comments.

The questions were:

1. Are there other problems or suggestions about water in your community, besides those listed above? and
2. What do you think are the top three priorities in your community to make sure there is enough water for the next 40 years?

Responses are transcribed in Appendix A. The most frequently and strongly expressed comments were incorporated into the process of prioritizing and articulating the principal water-related needs and concerns that the Water Plan is intended to address. These are discussed in the next section, and the means to address these priorities are discussed in the **PLANNING ALTERNATIVES** chapter.

PRINCIPAL NEEDS AND CONCERNS

Concerns and priorities for future water planning have emerged from discussions with residents and stakeholders that have taken place in many different venues over several years. Discussions have taken place in Advisory Committee meetings, at meetings of acequia commissioners and parcientes, at meetings conducted to gather input for Rio Arriba County general planning, at meetings held specifically to discuss regional water planning in communities around the Rio Chama watershed, and in individual meetings with key stakeholders such as elected officials, water system operators, acequia association officials, and County staff. Notes and summaries of discussions from regional water planning meetings are included in Appendix A, along with responses to questionnaires.

Based on this input, the essential needs and concerns for a secure water supply in our region can be summarized in seven water planning goals:

- Keep our water rights within the region to protect local water resources and provide for future growth.
- Preserve the acequia system and strengthen its role in community life.
- Enhance growing season streamflows (by increasing storage or other means) so that agriculture is less limited by low summer flows.
- Protect water quality.

- Develop local agriculture with information, marketing, and financial support
- Provide reliable water supplies to community water systems.
- Conserve and reuse water resources where appropriate.
- Protect and restore upper watershed areas.

The importance attached by planning participants to protecting our water rights and the acequia system, not only as a means of delivering water but also as a vital part of every community in the region, can hardly be overstated. The highest planning priority, based on all discussions that have taken place in the region, is to maintain the agricultural way of life in the Rio Chama watershed and the acequia system that makes it possible. To accomplish this, we will need to preserve both our rights to use water and the physical infrastructure to deliver it where and when we need it.

Another major priority that was mentioned in virtually every discussion about water issues was to protect, or restore where needed, our upper watershed areas. It is an important goal of water management and planning in its own right; but it is also a powerful technique that can contribute to the achievement of the other goals listed above. Details of the strategies evaluated and recommended to address these priorities expressed by region residents are discussed in the **PLANNING ALTERNATIVES** chapter.