

Historical Archive B

Correspondence with Pueblos

MIDDLE RIO GRANDE WATER ASSEMBLY

POST OFFICE BOX 25862 ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87125-5862
505.867.3889

March 6, 2002

Mr. Derrick J. Lente, Chair
Six Middle Rio Grande Pueblos Water Coalition
Pueblo of Sandia
Box 6008
Bernalillo, New Mexico 87004

Dear Mr. Lente:

The Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly will convene its Sixth Annual Water Assembly on April 6. On behalf of the Water Assembly, I am writing to invite members of the Six Middle Rio Grande Pueblos Water Coalition and the individual Pueblo governments to participate in the Assembly as representatives either of the Coalition or of individual Pueblo governments. We would also welcome the non-official attendance of individual members of the Coalition's member Pueblos, on whatever basis they might choose.

We would be delighted to meet with any or all of the Pueblo Governors or Councils and with the Coalition itself to deliver this invitation personally and, if desired, to present and discuss the nature, progress, and plans of the Water Assembly. Moreover, we would welcome Pueblo representatives' participation in our efforts to develop a water plan for the Middle Rio Grande region.

We recognize that the Pueblos within the Middle Rio Grande region have not chosen to participate in the work of the Water Assembly in the past, except to address our annual Assemblies regarding their concerns. We recognize that the Pueblos are independent sovereign governments, for whom decisions and agreements can only be made on a government to government basis.

We understand the concerns of Pueblos that cooperating with a regional water planning effort might somehow be construed as "conceding" to or allowing an "inadvertent quantification" of water rights. For our part, we wish to assure the Pueblos that the Water Assembly intends nothing of the sort. We would value the participation and perspectives of Pueblo representatives and their contributions to our work and deliberations, but would never expect Pueblos to join in any decisions that they felt could undermine their position.

As you may know, the Water Assembly is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the development of a water plan for the Middle Rio Grande region through an open, inclusive, and participatory process. Although people from federal, state and local government agencies are active in our work, they do not make policies for the governments they serve, and they work within the Assembly as individuals and as volunteers. Because of this, members of the Water Assembly's Action Committee are *not* in a position to make binding agreements on behalf of any

of the governmental bodies in the region. This would be the case for Pueblo representatives, as well, and would constitute a safeguard against the possibility that a Pueblo government might be held accountable for a decision in which one of its representatives participated.

To maintain communication with local jurisdictions within the region, we are working in close partnership with the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments and its Water Resources Board. We recognize that only governments have the authority to implement water policies, and it is only by convincing governments of the viability of our plan that it stands a chance of being implemented.

We are working toward a deadline of June 30, 2003, for delivery of a plan for acceptance by the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission. We are aware that the fact that the regional planning process is related to State water-planning mandates is a source of concern to the Pueblos. Any inference that the Pueblos' participation might be viewed as acceptance of State jurisdiction, we believe, would be wrong—and unenforceable. The law enabling regional water planning states only that a region sharing “sufficient hydrological and political interests in common” ought to be able to “plan for its water future.” I believe that all jurisdictions in the Middle Rio Grande region including the Pueblos do share such common interests and have a stake in a future together.

Over the past five years of its existence, the Water Assembly has performed or sponsored a great deal of work to help us understand the nature of the situation we face as a region. We developed a water budget that tracks the average inflows to and outflows of water from the region and concludes that we get by with our current uses today only by mining our groundwater at an unsustainable 50,000 to 70,000 acre-feet annually. This has implications for all of us in the region as we look to a future where population is expected to double by 2050.

Building on the Assembly's interim mission statement for the regional plan – “to balance all water uses with renewable supply” – we have identified a substantial set of possible alternative actions designed to achieve this end. We are in the process of studying and identifying potential impacts of these alternatives so as to make sound recommendations. At the same time, we are engaging the public in a “water balancing exercise” to identify the best mix of uses and savings of our limited wet water. These are early steps in a new phase of the planning process.

We aim to bring together representatives of all of the region's water interests to discuss, debate and – we hope – to establish a consensus on just how the region's limited water supplies should be utilized in the future. The Assembly recognizes the sensitive nature of the issues at stake and is seeking to create a forum for honest and candid discussion of water *use* issues which consciously does not jeopardize or compromise anyone's water *rights* or the benefits that are derived from them. Of perhaps even greater importance, we believe that a common vision for the Middle Rio Grande can be constructed through healthy dialogue and debate about agricultural, cultural, economic, environmental, rural and urban water uses and values.

Should you and the Pueblo members of the Coalition desire to participate formally in next month's Assembly, we will set aside time for a presentation by the Coalition. It would be

particularly valuable to hear what opportunities might exist for coordination and collaboration between the Water Assembly and the Coalition. However, in order to formally include the Coalition in the printed program and other advertising materials we would like to learn of their acceptance very promptly. If formal participation is not practicable, we simply urge your personal participation and that of other Coalition members as individuals.

The Assembly would value deeply the historical experience and rich insights of the Pueblo people who have lived the longest on this reach of the Rio Grande. I hope we can work to build a common future in which we take each other's needs into account as we learn how to share this precious resource. We look forward to the possibility of your joining us in this endeavor. As in previous years, the Assembly will convene in the Anthropology lecture hall on the main campus of the University of New Mexico. Should you wish to reach me, my phone number is 867-3889. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Bob Wessely, Chair
Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly

Cc: Governor Andrew Quintana, Pueblo of Cochiti
Governor Alvino Lucero, Pueblo of Isleta
Governor Stewart Paisano, Pueblo of Sandia
Governor Lawrence Trancosa, Pueblo of San Felipe
Governor Bruce Sanchez, Pueblo of Santa Ana
Governor Ernest Lovato, Pueblo of Santo Domingo
Herb Becker, Consultant

M I D D L E R I O G R A N D E W A T E R A S S E M B L Y

POST OFFICE BOX 25862 ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87125-5862
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April 29, 2003

Mr. Derrick J. Lente, Chair
Six Middle Rio Grande Pueblos Water Coalition
Pueblo of Sandia
Box 6008
Bernalillo, New Mexico 87004

Dear Mr. Lente:

The Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly will convene its Seventh Annual Water Assembly on June 7 along with the Regional Forum on Planning Scenarios. On behalf of the Water Assembly, I am writing to invite members of the Six Middle Rio Grande Pueblos Water Coalition and the individual Pueblo governments to participate in the Assembly as representatives either of the Coalition or of individual Pueblo governments. We would also welcome the non-official attendance of individual members of the Coalition's member Pueblos, on whatever basis they might choose.

We would be delighted to meet with any or all of the Pueblo Governors or Councils and with the Coalition itself to deliver this invitation personally and, if desired, to present and discuss the nature, progress, and plans of the Water Assembly. Moreover, we would welcome Pueblo representatives' participation in our efforts to develop a water plan for the Middle Rio Grande region.

We recognize that the Pueblos within the Middle Rio Grande region have not chosen to participate in the work of the Water Assembly in the past, except to address our annual Assemblies regarding their concerns. We recognize that the Pueblos are independent sovereign governments, for whom decisions and agreements can only be made on a government to government basis.

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Assembly's Action Committee are *not* in a position to make binding agreements on behalf of any of the governmental bodies in the region. This would be the case for Pueblo representatives, as well, and would constitute a safeguard against the possibility that a Pueblo government might be held accountable for a decision in which one of its representatives participated.

To maintain communication with local jurisdictions within the region, we are working in close partnership with the Mid-Region Council of Governments, and its Water Resources Board. We recognize that only governments have the authority to implement water policies, and it is only by convincing governments of the viability of our plan that it stands a chance of being implemented.

We are working toward a deadline late in 2003 for delivery of a plan for acceptance by the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission. We are aware that the fact that the regional planning process is related to State water-planning mandates is a source of concern to the Pueblos. Although there is an implication that participation might be viewed as acceptance of State jurisdiction, we believe that any inference to that effect would be wrong,—and unenforceable. The law enabling regional water planning states only that a region sharing “sufficient hydrological and political interests in common” ought to be able to “plan for its water future.” I believe that all jurisdictions in the Middle Rio Grande region including the Pueblos do share such common interests and have a stake in a future together.

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Building on the Assembly's interim mission statement for the regional plan – “to balance all water uses with renewable supply” – we have identified a substantial set of possible alternative actions designed to achieve this end. We are in the process of studying and identifying potential impacts of these alternatives so as to make sound recommendations. At the same time, we are engaging the public in a “water balancing exercise” to identify the best mix of uses and savings of our limited wet water. These are early steps in a new phase of the planning process.

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The Assembly would value deeply the historical experience and rich insights of the Pueblo people who have lived the longest on this reach of the Rio Grande. I hope we can work to build a common future in which we take each other's needs into account as we learn how to share this precious resource. We look forward to the possibility of your joining us in this endeavor. The Assembly and Regional Forum will convene in the Dane Smith lecture hall on the main campus of the University of New Mexico. Should you wish to reach me, my phone number is 867-3889. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Bob Wessely, Chair
Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly

Cc: Governor Simon Suina, Pueblo of Cochiti
Governor Alvino Lucero, Pueblo of Isleta
Governor Stuwart Paisano, Pueblo of Sandia
Governor Anthony Ortiz, Pueblo of San Felipe
Governor Myron Armijo, Pueblo of Santa Ana
Governor Everett Chaves, Pueblo of Santo Domingo
Herb Becker, Consultant