

Supporting Document C-6

Water Chronicles

Water Assembly Newsletter

Middle Rio Grande Water Chronicle

Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly

PO Box 9844 Albuquerque, NM 87117-9844

July 1999

MRG Holds 3rd Water Assembly

In March, residents of Sandoval, Bernalillo and Valencia Counties, along with interested citizens from neighboring regions, were invited to the 3rd Assembly for Water Planning in the Middle Rio Grande. The all-day session gave members of the general public an opportunity to review what the Assembly's Action Committee has accomplished in the year and a half since the Second Water Assembly, and to help determine what course water planners will take in the months ahead.

The Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly, which became a non-profit corporation early this year, shares responsibility for regional water planning with the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments. Both organizations are committed to the partnership say Assembly Action Committee Chairman Bob Swartwout and MRGCOG Executive Director Dennis Foltz. A water plan will be developed by the Assembly and presented to MRGCOG's Regional Water Board, whose members represent the local governments ultimately responsible for implementing the plan. MRGCOG will provide administrative and technical

assistance, and serve as fiscal agent for the \$150,000 in Interstate Stream Commission funds awarded the region last December. With its non-profit status, the Assembly hopes to be able to raise additional funds, and in-kind support is being received from both the private and public sector.

Assembly participants were reminded of the complex problems that Middle Rio Grande planners face by several key speakers.

Roy Montoya, Tribal Administrator for Santa Ana Pueblo, spoke on behalf of a water planning coalition formed by the Six Middle Rio Grande Pueblos. It is vitally important, he said, to recognize the special status of the tribes. As sovereign nations, they are guaranteed prior and paramount water rights which are not subject to state jurisdiction or the requirements of the Rio Grande Compact. Federal, state and local governments, however, appropriate ground and surface water with little regard for the impact it has on the pueblos. Tribes are willing to take whatever steps are necessary to defend their rights, but litigation should be a last resort, Montoya said. The pueblos are open to "working cooperatively with neighbors on a government-to-government basis."

In another address, Mayor Jim Baca of Albuquerque told the Assembly that the water planning initiative must involve business leaders, elected officials, and the tribes, and that everyone will have to give a little if the process is to succeed. Ecosystems tend to be forgotten in an urban setting, he noted, and urged planners to remember that what goes on in southern Colorado, and in surrounding watersheds, affects water supply in the Middle Rio Grande.

Conference attendees also got a look at the most significant work product of the Water Assembly's Action Committee to date, the Middle Rio Grande Surface Water Budget, a scientific consensus document that offers a framework for understanding the limits and the complexity of the region's water supply system. Presented by Frank Titus, Chair of the Action Committee's Technical Working Group, and a panel of water planning specialists who helped with its compilation, the "budget" is really a balance sheet showing water inflows and outflows to the Rio Grande between Otowi Bridge near Española and Elephant Butte Reservoir. Though the budget is termed a "current draft," its sobering message is not expected to change much; study after study

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has shown that the difference between inflow and outflow to the basin in an average year is a mere 44,000 acre feet. In times of drought, that small positive balance can become a deficit, causing an under-delivery of water to users downstream.

At present the water budget deals primarily with surface water, but its creators hope to expand the document to include the complex connections between ground and surface water systems. Those same experts caution that the budget does not emphasize the enormous variability natural to the region, and point out that although the Middle Rio Grande can receive inflows of from 400,000 to 2,900,000 acre feet annually, the region's maximum allowable depletion under the Rio Grande Compact is but 405,000 acre feet.

The water budget raised the following concerns among 3rd Assembly participants:

- * The Middle Rio Grande basin may have been "short-changed" by the Rio Grande Compact.
- * Planning may be unrealistic as long as pueblo water rights remain unquantified.
- * "Paper water" exceeds the amount of wet water allocated to the region.
- * Compact water passing downstream ought to provide sufficient flows for the endangered silvery minnow.

* Evaporation at Elephant Butte Reservoir is costly for the Middle Rio Grande.

* An extended drought such as the one the region endured in the 1950's could prove disastrous today.

Though the water budget discussion has produced no easy solutions to the region's problems, it is helping focus attention on the magnitude of the work that lies ahead.

As to the public's role in the planning process, Interstate Stream Commission Regional Water Planning Program Manager Mary Helen Follingstad said that with its strong emphasis on grassroots involvement, the Middle Rio Grande is a model for how regional water planning ought to proceed. Even so, attendees of the 3rd Assembly suggested there should be greater participation by business and development interests, public health officials, and elected officials, and that more diversity is needed on the Action Committee.

In addition to correcting these shortcomings and continuing the public involvement program, the Action Committee's immediate tasks include completing the contract and scope of work with the Interstate Stream Commission; designing and implementing a fund-raising strategy; and revising the water budget to simplify its narrative component and add pertinent groundwater data.

Roadshow Reaches Out to MRG Residents

Public awareness of and participation in regional water planning is essential to its success. One tool developed by the Water Assembly to help achieve it is the Roadshow.

A twenty-minute presentation with overheads and take-home handouts, the Roadshow introduces residents of the central Rio Grande basin to the concept and history of regional planning, and to the now-acknowledged fact that we are dangerously close to exceeding our available water supply.

The show emphasizes two-way learning and listening, encourages partnerships with local governments and organizations, and offers citizens a comfortable way to take part in the water planning process. Comments received at each presentation are used to further refine the program, and to document the values and perspectives expressed by water users throughout the region.

Presentations have been made to the Rio Rancho Utility Commission, Valencia Soil & Water Conservation District, Cuba Soil & Water Conservation District, the 3rd MRG water Assembly, Old Town Optimists Club, the League of Women Voters, the Albuquerque Academy Student Forum, the Socorro Rotary Club, and the Sandoval County communities of Algodones, Pena Blanca, Placitas, La Jara, and Canon.

*To schedule a Roadshow contact
Susan Gorman
(505) 265-3231
bblairb@aol.com*

Water Planning Director On Board At MRGCOG

MRGCOG's newly-named Director of Water Planning is James T. Gross. You can reach him at the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments office, (505) 247-1750, or by e-mail at jgross@mrgcog.org

MRG Council of Governments Creates Water Resources Board

To provide a decision-making process for regional water issues, representatives of local governments in the middle Rio Grande valley have been invited to serve on a Council of Governments' Water Resources Board.

According to its interim bylaws, the Water Resources Board is open to all governmental entities with jurisdiction and authority in water planning and management in the MRG region. Within the board membership, a Water Provider's Council will also be established, consisting of representatives of public and tribal water rights holders.

Documents Available

Copies of the following documents are available from the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments office in Albuquerque: a current list of Action Committee members and constituencies; MRG Water Assembly bylaws; interim bylaws for the Council of Government's Water Resources Board; Memorandum of Understanding between the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly and Council of Governments; the Assembly's 1998 Annual Report; a Mission, Goals and Issues Document; the current draft of the Middle Rio Grande Water Budget; a summary of proceedings of the 3rd Assembly for Water Planning in the MRG; flyers for the MRG Water Assembly Roadshow.

Contract Awarded for Two-Phase MRG Water Supply Study

What is the water supply for the Middle Rio Grande? The first of five essential water-planning questions will be answered in a two-phase study funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission. A contract for the water supply study has been awarded to S.S. Papadopoulos & Associates, a groundwater and environmental consulting company based in Bethesda, Maryland.

Personnel from the company's Denver office will staff and manage the study, with public affairs and communication support from the Rozelle Group, assistance from Dennis Cooper, P.E., of Santa Fe for local data research and acquisition, and advanced support in GIS and linked metadata from ISSI, Inc.

The first phase of the study will result in a work plan that will include involvement of a wide range of agencies, organizations and individual stakeholders, identification of existing water supply studies and data sets; assembly of pertinent data sets; and the creation of a metadata base.

The work plan is scheduled for completion by September. Phase Two of the project entails execution of the work plan.

Action Committee Officers Named for 1999

At its annual meeting on April 21, the Action Committee, representative body for the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly, named officers for 1999. They are Robert Swartwout, Chairman; Sterling Grogan, Vice Chairman; Marty Mitchell, Secretary; and James Burson Treasurer. The officers and those appointed to chair the Assembly's several constituency groups will serve on the A.C.'s Executive Committee.

Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly Action Committee Members

Advocates and (Alternates)

Sharon Aller--League of Women Voters
 Eileen Hilson--real estate (Peter Gineris)
 Kevin Bean--environment, youth (Susan Gorman)
 Steve Harris--recreationists (Ondrea Linderoth)
 Elaine Hebard--neighborhoods (Ric Richardson)
 Michael Leon-Guerrera--South West Organizing Project
 Frank Robinson--large industry (Kirk Benton)
 Lisa Robert--conservancy ratepayers, irrigators
 Lynne Schiuter--Chambers of Commerce (Terry Reister)
 Ida Tallala--acequias

Specialists and (Alternates)

Jim Brinkman--hydrogeologist
 Lee Brown--economist (Nat Wollman)
 Peter Gering Grogan--biologist, MRGCD
 Paul Gutierrez--agriculture
 David Korzdorfer--Natural Resource Conservation Service
 Marty Mitchell--environmental engineer
 Joe Quintana--MRG Council of Governments
 John Shomaker--hydrologist
 J. Paul Stockton--U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 Frank Titus--hydrologist (Steve Hansen)
 Jeff Whitney--boaque (Cliff Crawford)

Managers and (Alternates)

Julie Baca--small municipalities (Jacquelin Guilbault)
 Omar Bradley--Federal Indian Trust, BIA
 James Burson
 Emmett Cart--Soil & Water Conservation Districts (Daie Jones)
 Eric Galloway--N.M. Environment Department
 Jaci Gould--U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
 Jeff Petersen--Bernalillo County (Matthew O'Grady)
 Subhas Shah--Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District
 John Stomp--City of Albuquerque Public Works
 Robert Swartwout--investor-owned utilities, NMUI (Ed Whaley)
 Lawrence Vigil--unincorporated communities, Corrales
 Larry Webb--Rio Rancho Utilities

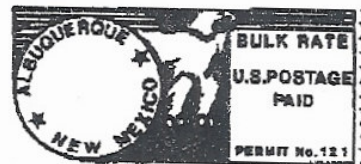
Action Committee meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month, from 5:30 to 7:30 PM, at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers office, 4101 Jefferson Place, NE, in Albuquerque.

You can participate in the MRG regional water planning initiative by attending Action Committee meetings, serving on a working group, or by joining our e-mail discussion list. To subscribe, send a request to: bblalrb@aol.com



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 Council of Governments
 of New Mexico**

317 Commercial N.E., Suite 300
 Albuquerque, N.M. 87102 (505) 247-3750



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February 2000

Conference Offers Insights On Rio Grande Compact

In December, New Mexico's Water Resources Research Institute held its 44th Annual Water Conference. The topic was the Rio Grande Compact, an interstate agreement which divides the surface waters of our familiar river among the states of Colorado, New Mexico and Texas. The average resident would probably fail to list the compact as one of the things which prescribes life in the Middle Rio Grande, but in truth, it has an affect on all who dwell in the basin. What follows is a sketch of the information presented at the conference.

Amending Oversights

The gathering was co-sponsored by the New Mexico Riparian Council, and there's a message in that co-sponsorship: the compact does not address environmental needs. The ecosystem is but one of a number of "water users" that drafters of the compact either didn't recognize, or chose to ignore, and today's water managers are having to deal with the consequences even as they are handcuffed by the constraints of the compact.

Interestingly enough, the realities that necessitated a compact are still with us: the Rio

Grande's natural flow is highly variable--there's often too much water early in the year when we don't need it, and not enough late in the summer when we do; the lion's share of our water evaporates or is transpired by vegetation; silt collects in delivery systems and elevates some reaches of the river above surrounding lands; and downstreamers still tend to litigate when they don't get the flows they expect or need.

Our understanding of the system has improved since the compact was penned. We now know that averages don't tell the whole story, and that in fact, we are "relying on a fixed water resource system to supply perpetually increasing demand." Population projections for the Rio Grande basin are staggering--at present rates, Juarez could contain as many as 13 million people by the year 2050, and closer to home, we speak with certainty about doubling our numbers. We are still clinging to the "big myth" that conservation of agricultural water will provide what we need for the future, though recent estimates are that reducing crop demands and improving irrigation efficiency will buy us only about 15-30% more water, and in exchange, there could be negative impacts to the cottonwood bosque, to wildlife

habitat, and to the recharge of local aquifers. There is also evidence from tree ring data that the tough times of the 1950's were "a walk in the park" compared to pre-historic periods of extreme drought in the basin which appear to have lasted for centuries rather than decades.

Luck Counts

New Mexico has been able to comply with the Rio Grande Compact since the 1970's. In addition to rigorous "control" of the river channel, and war on exotic phreatophytes such as salt cedar and Russian olive, the basin has enjoyed three relatively wet decades. We have also been supplementing the river with municipal return flows of mined groundwater, and annual infusions of non-native water from the San Juan/Chama diversion project.

But sooner or later, we will suffer a comeuppance. There are a number of contributing factors to that pending reality check. Municipalities like Albuquerque and Santa Fe are planning to curtail groundwater pumping by switching to direct use of their allotments of San Juan/Chama water; the eighteen pueblos and

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compact...

three tribes of the region (which were accorded no seat at the compact negotiation table) are beginning to assert their prior and paramount rights to water; and given the outcome of litigation on the Pecos River in eastern New Mexico, it's a fairly safe prediction that future underdeliveries of Rio Grande Compact water will result not simply in debt status, but in lawsuits for both water and damages.

Shreds of Hope

Many, including federal water management agencies and our neighbors downstream, believe that at least some of these problems can be addressed through operational changes.

This month, the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation will begin an Upper Rio Grande Water Operations Review. (*See story, this page.*) This, along with studies of water supply and demand underway in the Middle Rio Grande, should provide the data for a revised big picture.

But, unless all the basin's water users can cooperate in finding new ways to share its limited water resources, the likelihood is that we, too, will go the way of every society before us which "overestimated the flows they depended on."

Harmonizing Rio Grande Management: the Water Operations Review

by Susan Gorman

Most of us realize the Rio Grande isn't the natural river it once was. Since well before the turn of the century, engineers, farmers and water managers have dammed, leveed, jetty-jacked, diverted, and conveyed the waters of the Rio Grande with an amazing array of control structures. Today, the rules and procedures of multiple agencies like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Interstate Stream Commission, and various irrigation and conservancy districts dictate the operation of these works. The time has come, federal and state agencies recently agreed in a Memorandum of Understanding, to explore what can be done under existing authority to improve how water is stored and delivered.

The Upper Rio Grande Water Operations Review will examine federal water operation activities in the Rio Grande Basin above Fort Quitman, Texas. Included in the review will be storage and release procedures of four Corps of Engineer reservoirs, three Bureau of Reclamation reservoirs, and operation of the BOR's Low Flow Conveyance Channel near Socorro, and Closed Basin Project in Colorado. These structures are major components of the plumbing system of our Great River, and how they are operated determines when and where water flows in the river.

Each agency operates under a separate mission and set of rules. The Corps of Engineers is charged with sediment control and with reducing the losses from floods; the BOR, which initially managed projects to provide water for irrigation, now has municipal, industrial, recreational, and environmental beneficiaries as well; and the Interstate Stream Commission is the agency which oversees both compact deliveries and releases of San Juan-Chama water.

Of course, this all takes place on the same river, and action by one agency affects the actions of the others. We now know there are more needs for water in the Rio Grande than there is wet water to meet them in an average year, and working smart is imperative; therefore, the decision was made to consider the development of an integrated plan so that operation of individual reservoirs and projects under lead agency control can be coordinated even as agency missions are being fulfilled. In the past, such a review of water operations would have been extremely difficult to accomplish. Today, a multi-agency committee is completing the development of a computer-based model called the Upper Rio Grande Water Operations Model, which makes it possible to run simulations of various water management scenarios.

The Water Ops Review will be conducted in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and an Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared to document the process and ensure the public is well informed about the effects of any proposed action on the environment. The EIS process begins early this year with publication of a Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register*. Public scoping meetings will be held in June, and the development and refining of alternatives will follow later in the year, with opportunities for citizens to provide input. Those who care about the river and a sustainable water supply for the future should watch for notices of these public meetings and plan to participate.

Is there a silver bullet here? Can integrated operation and coordination between management agencies make more water? Emphatically not. But it *is* possible to discover better ways under existing authorities to deliver the right amount of water to the right place at the right time so there will be enough for all.

MRG Water Planners Adopt "Plan to Plan"

Last month, members of the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly Action Committee held a "mapping session" of the numerous activities the group will undertake this year. Facilitators Ric Richardson and Tim Karpoff led participants through formulation of a vision statement, an examination of the benefits and dangers of pursuing that vision, and an assessment of the committee's strengths and weaknesses. Then committee members drew up a list of commitments which task groups will undertake to fulfill the scope of work between the region and the ISC.

An Optimistic Vision

By 2003, workshop participants dreamed, diverse user, age, and cultural groups will be involved in the MRG regional water planning process; resource-based public policy will be in place to guide residential, commercial and industrial development; litigation will have been averted through cooperation and coordination; water conservation will be enthusiastically practiced by both rural and urban water users; the middle Rio Grande ecosystem will be thriving; and water will have become increasingly valued.

Such a utopia will take far longer than three years to achieve, participants acknowledged, but there have already been benefits from the regional planning effort.

Those include a well-developed technical picture of the region's water supply, a surprisingly large core group of dedicated citizens intent on continuing the grassroots process, and perhaps the genesis of trust between formerly adversarial entities.

The group also acknowledged that not all the key players in the region are participating in the planning process; there is a lack of political will at the state level, as well as a lack of coherent local organization; the region is huge, assuring major differences between sub-regional interests; and burnout is high among members of the Action Committee. Participants also feared reliance on bureaucracy to drive and/or fund the planning effort.

Commitment for 2000

The group agreed it must fulfill *but not be limited by* the current contract with the Interstate Stream Commission. That means keeping the MRG Water Assembly process alive, becoming more visible in the region, communicating effectively with the public, recruiting new people, educating state and local politicians, and assuming a leadership role in implementing the water plan.

Participants developed a twelve-month plan for each of its three working groups, identifying end products, and the steps necessary to accomplish them.

Task Group One has contracted out a study of historic and current water demand, and a future demand analysis will be performed by the work group and MRGCOG.

Task Group Two will focus on translating the MRG water budget for a lay audience; refining and updating the MRG Roadshow; developing a "Community Conversations" strategy to collect input on goals, values and objectives from the public; organizing MRG Assemblies in March and October; and continuing to produce the water planning region's newsletter.

Task Group Three will contract for a public survey, identify regional alternatives using input received from a comment database and technical review; and score and analyze the preliminary alternatives.

Also identified during the workshop were a number of issues which cut across the work of all the Task Groups, requiring involvement, review, and possible actions by the Action Committee and its Executive Committee. These include increasing the participation of various interest groups in the planning process, defining the respective roles of the MRG Water Assembly and the MRG Water Resources Board, and building support among local entities for the future water plan.

Water Assembly 2000
the 4th Assembly for Water Planning in the Middle Rio Grande

"Living Within Our Budget"

Saturday, March 25, 2000
9:00 am to 4:30 pm
Anthropology Lecture Hall on the University of New Mexico Campus

Lunch will be provided: \$5 early registration, or \$10 at the door

For more information call Kevin Bean, 293-9208

You can also participate in the MRG regional water planning initiative by attending Action Committee meetings, serving on a working group, or by joining our e-mail discussion list. To subscribe to the list, send a request to bblairb@aol.com.

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Living Within Our Water Budget

Last year, residents of the Middle Rio Grande water planning region were introduced to a balance sheet called the Water Budget. A summary of inflows and outflows to the mainstem Rio Grande from Cochiti to Elephant Butte Reservoir, the budget, created by technical volunteers and members of the MRG Water Assembly Action Committee, is intended to be a starting point for discussions about how we will meet the region's water needs in the future. This March, attendees at the 4th Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly were asked to consider just what it will take to live within the budget's limits.

A Family Budget

Economist F. Lee Brown likens the regional water supply situation to "a family budget in which everything is measured in acre-feet of water. The Middle Rio Grande's *gross water income* is the annual surface flow of the Rio Grande and its tributaries into the region. Our *disposable water income* is what remains after deducting deliveries to southern New Mexico, Texas and Mexico under a legal obligation called the Rio Grande Compact. Those deliveries are effectively our taxes. Our family's *water savings account* is the stock of groundwater in the aquifer beneath our feet."

Brown says after toting up the income statement and balance sheet, an accountant would tell us our family is "chronically over-spending

its annual disposable water income and covering the annual deficit by persistently drawing down our water savings account."

The average annual gross water income available to the MRG from 1972 through 1997 was 1,200,000 acre-feet. Deduct Rio Grande Compact deliveries and our annual average disposable water income is 414,000 acre-feet. Add up the evaporative losses from open bodies of water such as Elephant Butte, and evapo-transpiration from the bosque, irrigated farms, golf courses, parks and residential lawns, and it's evident that since 1972, we've been tapping our water savings account for an average 70,000 acre-feet per year. We're overspending even though our annual disposable income has increased by an average of 55,000 acre-feet due to water imported from the Colorado River basin through the San Juan-Chama Diversion Project.

"These numbers are only averages," Brown warns, and they've occurred during a period which experts tell us may have been unusually wet. "When we encounter an extended drought, as is inevitable, our income will be considerably reduced. The situation is going to get worse before it gets better. New uses of water arise virtually every day and old uses need more to survive." There is little chance of increasing the region's water income, and prudence dictates that we stop pilfering our water savings account. To respond to our "budgetary reality," Brown

believes, we will have to create new supplies of water from existing uses.

Supply & Demand

The Middle Rio Grande's water supply comes from three sources: native flows of the Rio Grande, supplementary flows acquired through the San Juan-Chama project, and ground water pumped from the aquifer. Due to climatic variability and an increasing number of water users, natural flow seldom meets the region's demands. Reservoirs provide some flexibility, making it possible for water to be stored and released as needed, but we have increasingly come to rely on our two supplemental sources. Now it appears we can not count on these additional supplies indefinitely. Aquifer drawdowns in the Albuquerque area prompted the city to re-examine its water supply strategy in the mid-1990's. To curtail its groundwater pumping, Albuquerque undertook an ambitious water conservation program and began making plans for the direct use of San Juan-Chama water. The 48,200 acre feet of imported Colorado River water owned by the city has quietly augmented the Rio Grande for almost thirty years. Middle Rio Grande residents of all species have become dependant on it, and also on the meaningful amount of ground water the city returns to the river as treated effluent. Alterations to this arrangement will have far-reaching repercussions.

budget...

It is likely that water rights in the region exceed the amount of water available. According to the State Engineer, "paper water" outstrips "wet water" by 200-400% on the Lower Rio Grande, and the same disparity probably exists upstream. There are three general categories of water depletions in the region: development and urban use, irrigated agriculture, and the needs of the ecosystem. A study of historic water demand being done by John W. Shomaker and Associates indicates that the MRG's biggest water user is Bernalillo County/City of Albuquerque; raw data also suggest that, for the moment, the city's water conservation efforts are offsetting increases to the size of its service area. The amount of water the city returns to the river as effluent, however, is far smaller than what it pumps from the aquifer, and just where the depletions are occurring is not yet known.

On the agricultural front, metering efforts by the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District since 1993 reveal more water is being diverted than state records indicate, and irrigation depletions are greatest in Valencia County. A variety of soil types makes consistent per-acre water usage difficult to achieve; at the same time, seepage from the extensive irrigation system contributes substantially to aquifer recharge. A general rule of thumb is that approximately one-third of the water diverted for irrigation goes to crops, a third returns to the river, and a third is considered 'lost' to evaporation and recharge. In the Albuquerque area, 75% of recharge to the shallow aquifer comes from the river, and 25% from irrigated fields and conservancy ditches.

Water use by riparian vegetation in the middle valley is also under intensive study. Current MRG

water budget figures are only "approximations," experts say, and it will take up to five years before evapo-transpiration rates can be accurately related to flow regimes and vegetation types in various reaches. What scientists do know is that man-made alterations to the river have been detrimental, and restoring natural functions like periodic overbank flooding is critical to a number of species.

Feedback From the Public

Because our economy, our environment, and our very survival depend on finding a balance between supply and demand, the region as a whole must decide how that balance will be achieved. 4th Assembly participants from various water use groups were asked to answer the following questions: *What is important to consider about this type of use? What would you like to see in the future? What actions might help achieve those visions?* Here are brief summaries of their replies.

Acequias--As small communities organized around a common resource, acequias perceive themselves to be "under assault." Traditional water users recognize a strong connection between land and water, but the two are separate commodities under state law. Economic pressures make the sale of water rights attractive to individual ditch members, and although such sales impact the entire acequia, few associations have the money to deal with the problem. Acequias are also being pushed by the state to achieve irrigation efficiency, but current water law is based on a "use it or lose it" philosophy, and there is no incentive whatsoever to conserve. Acequia stakeholders fear that conservation measures such as ditch lining may destroy age-old cultural traditions and the character of

the land. What they want to see in the future is a society which "values and admires living on the land," where children "know where food comes from," and where people act responsibly to sustain agriculture *and* the ecosystem. Both acequia members and those outside traditional communities need to "plan as if drought is inevitable," and acequias suggest there are important civics lessons to be learned by studying how such communities have managed to survive for so many centuries.

Agriculture--Unlike areas where large scale agri-business is the norm, most farms in New Mexico's central valley are relatively small. Nevertheless, agriculture's economic significance is large: were agricultural irrigation to cease for a single year, estimates are the region would suffer \$195 million in economic losses. Technical aspects of the region's irrigation and drainage system are not well understood by the public, and growing knowledge about the hydrologic system and how agricultural water use fits into the picture has not been well-communicated. Urbanization and "cultural erosion" are the biggest threats to agricultural lands. Participants envisioned a day when farming and its environmental benefit are recognized as part of the quality of life in the MRG, where there are established urban growth boundaries, where land is held for more than its "economic" (development) value, and where technology has helped to reduce agricultural water use by perhaps 50%. Achieving such goals will require public education about the role of farming, a more efficient irrigation delivery system, and legislation that supports greenbelt tax exemptions, local comprehensive plans, farmland preservation, and instream flows for the benefit of the environment. In addition, agricultural and environmental groups will have to

form working coalitions.

Aquifer--MRG aquifers form a dynamic system of subsurface water which moves down the valley with intermittent connections to the river. Much remains unknown about local recharge and storage capability, and about how drawdowns affect future water availability, riparian vegetation, and land subsidence. As the City of Albuquerque switches to surface water and effluent reuse to meet municipal needs, the aquifer is likely to be seen as a drought reserve, and if Aquifer Storage & Retrieval becomes a reality, at least some of the region's supply could be stored below ground instead of in large reservoirs where evaporation losses are substantial. Actions which might be taken to protect and preserve the aquifer include slowing runoff, reducing the amount of paving, and inducing percolation where recharge potential is greatest; strengthening water conservation regulations; harvesting rainwater; discouraging sod lawns; initiating impact fees for new development; and adopting rate structures that reflect the true value of water.

Economic Development--People need to have a correct picture of what it means to live in a semi-arid place, and such education should begin with those who are already here. Unless the general standard of living is raised, few will make water conservation a priority. Economic development depends on growth, and a limited water supply means there is a limit to growth. The group felt MRG planners should be conservative when estimating available resources; they suggested that current development patterns are not sustainable. Concerns were voiced about the impacts of development on agriculture, the environment, and the ability of communities to choose the future for

themselves. To support economic growth while making water use in the region more sustainable, we will need to agree on what kind of economic development we want. Missing partners need to be brought to the planning table, especially public officials with clout, and water experts should serve on all economic development committees. Reuse and conservation should be encouraged in all sectors, and information that reflects the total water picture should be communicated to those who want to re-locate here.

Municipal--Most of the water used indoors is returned to the system as wastewater, but outdoor water use is largely consumptive. Participants felt municipalities expecting to lease water to meet continued growth should "imagine not getting any," and instead begin to maximize use of what they have. In the future, they believe, municipal water conservation will be mandatory, and storm and greywater harvesting will be common; the public will be aware of sustainability and the links between water and other natural resources; laws and policies will have been developed to control growth; and there will be more trust between governmental entities and their constituents. What is needed are new construction codes, and combined land and water use plans which take density into consideration. In addition, the state should develop controls for all domestic wells.

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help preserve open space, and conservation programs underway in urban centers can be used to disseminate information to the region as a whole. The future should include more public greenbelt areas, regional parks, and open space, in place of private lawns.

Riparian--Manmade structures influence MRG riparian areas, from jetty jacks which establish the river's channel, to the railroad bridge at San Marcial which limits how much water can be released from upstream reservoirs. There are sediment and flood plain management problems throughout the region, and some reaches of the river support monotypic stands of non-native vegetation which consume considerable amounts water. Participants envisioned that in the future, the San Marcial railroad crossing will be addressed to allow for larger releases and flooding of the bosque upstream; the river's natural hydrograph will be restored, along with sediment transport and cottonwood regeneration; Russian olive, salt cedar and Siberian elm will be controlled and restoration areas established to enhance wildlife habitat and stands of native vegetation; and fuel loads will be greatly reduced to lessen fire danger. To attain these goals, ordinances are needed against building in the 100-year flood plain, there needs to be extensive education about phreatophytes, research and monitoring of evapo-transpiration in the bosque must continue, and economic uses must be found for non-native vegetation removed from riparian areas.

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Albuquerque, NM, 87117-9844.*

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You can participate in the MRG regional planning initiative by attending Action Committee meetings on the 3rd Wednesday of each month from 7:30 PM to 9:00 PM, at the US Army Corps of Engineers 4101 Jefferson Place, NE, in Albuquerque; or by joining our e-mail discussion working group; or by sending a request to bblairb@aol.com.

If there are changes to your mailing address, you would like to be added to the MRG Water Assembly mailing list, please call Jim Gross, at the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments, 247-1750.

**Visit our website at
www.waterassembly.org**

Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly



**Middle Rio Grande
Council of Governments
of New Mexico**

317 Commercial N.E., Suite 300
Albuquerque, N.M. 87102 (505) 247-1750



Middle Rio Grande Water Chronicle

Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly PO Box 9844 Albuquerque, NM 87117-9844 June 2000

Living Within Our Water Budget

Last year, residents of the Middle Rio Grande water planning region were introduced to a balance sheet called the Water Budget. A summary of inflows and outflows to the mainstem Rio Grande from Cochiti to Elephant Butte Reservoir, the budget, created by technical volunteers and members of the MRG Water Assembly Action Committee, is intended to be a starting point for discussions about how we will meet the region's water needs in the future. This March, attendees at the 4th Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly were asked to consider just what it will take to live within the budget's limits.

A Family Budget

Economist F. Lee Brown likens the regional water supply situation to "a family budget in which everything is measured in acre-feet of water. The Middle Rio Grande's *gross water income* is the annual surface flow of the Rio Grande and its tributaries into the region. Our *disposable water income* is what remains after deducting deliveries to southern New Mexico, Texas and Mexico under a legal obligation called the Rio Grande Compact. Those deliveries are effectively our taxes. Our family's *water savings account* is the stock of groundwater in the aquifer beneath our feet."

Brown says after toting up the income statement and balance sheet, an accountant would tell us our family is "chronically over-spending

its annual disposable water income and covering the annual deficit by persistently drawing down our water savings account."

The average annual gross water income available to the MRG from 1972 through 1997 was 1,200,000 acre-feet. Deduct Rio Grande Compact deliveries and our annual average disposable water income is 414,000 acre-feet. Add up the evaporative losses from open bodies of water such as Elephant Butte, and evapotranspiration from the bosque, irrigated farms, golf courses, parks and residential lawns, and it's evident that since 1972, we've been tapping our water savings account for an average 70,000 acre-feet per year. We're overspending even though our annual disposable income has increased by an average of 55,000 acre-feet due to water imported from the Colorado River basin through the San Juan-Chama Diversion Project.

"These numbers are only averages," Brown warns, and they've occurred during a period which experts tell us may have been unusually wet. "When we encounter an extended drought, as is inevitable, our income will be considerably reduced. The situation is going to get worse before it gets better. New uses of water arise virtually every day and old uses need more to survive." There is little chance of increasing the region's water income, and prudence dictates that we stop pilfering our water savings account. To respond to our "budgetary reality," Brown

believes, we will have to create new supplies of water from existing uses.

Supply & Demand

The Middle Rio Grande's water supply comes from three sources: native flows of the Rio Grande, supplementary flows acquired through the San Juan-Chama project, and ground water pumped from the aquifer. Due to climatic variability and an increasing number of water users, natural flow seldom meets the region's demands. Reservoirs provide some flexibility, making it possible for water to be stored and released as needed, but we have increasingly come to rely on our two supplemental sources. Now it appears we can not count on these additional supplies indefinitely. Aquifer drawdowns in the Albuquerque area prompted the city to re-examine its water supply strategy in the mid-1990's. To curtail its groundwater pumping, Albuquerque undertook an ambitious water conservation program and began making plans for the direct use of San Juan-Chama water. The 48,200 acre feet of imported Colorado River water owned by the city has quietly augmented the Rio Grande for almost thirty years. Middle Rio Grande residents of all species have become dependant on it, and also on the meaningful amount of ground water the City returns to the river as treated effluent. Alterations to this arrangement will have far-reaching repercussions.

(see Budget, page 2)

budget...

It is likely that water rights in the region exceed the amount of water available. According to the State Engineer, "paper water" outstrips "wet water" by 200-400% on the Lower Rio Grande, and the same disparity probably exists upstream. There are three general categories of water depletions in the region: development and urban use, irrigated agriculture, and the needs of the ecosystem. A study of historic water demand being done by John W. Shomaker and Associates indicates that the MRG's biggest water user is Bernalillo County/City of Albuquerque; raw data also suggest that, for the moment, the city's water conservation efforts are offsetting increases to the size of its service area. The amount of water the city returns to the river as effluent, however, is far smaller than what it pumps from the aquifer, and just where the depletions are occurring is not yet known.

On the agricultural front, metering efforts by the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District since 1993 reveal more water is being diverted than state records indicate, and irrigation depletions are greatest in Valencia County. A variety of soil types makes consistent per-acre water useage difficult to achieve; at the same time, seepage from the extensive irrigation system contributes substantially to aquifer recharge. A general rule of thumb is that approximately one-third of the water diverted for irrigation goes to crops, a third returns to the river, and a third is considered 'lost' to evaporation and recharge. In the Albuquerque area, 75% of recharge to the shallow aquifer comes from the river, and 25% from irrigated fields and conservancy ditches.

Water use by riparian vegetation in the middle valley is also under intensive study. Current MRG

water budget figures are only "approximations," experts say, and it will take up to five years before evapotranspiration rates can be accurately related to flow regimes and vegetation types in various reaches. What scientists do know is that man-made alterations to the river have been detrimental, and restoring natural functions like periodic overbank flooding is critical to a number of species.

Feedback From the Public

Because our economy, our environment, and our very survival depend on finding a balance between supply and demand, the region as a whole must decide how that balance will be achieved. 4th Assembly participants from various water use groups were asked to answer the following questions: *What is important to consider about this type of use? What would you like to see in the future? What actions might help achieve those visions?* Here are brief summaries of their replies.

Acequias--As small communities organized around a common resource, acequias percieve themselves to be "under assault." Traditional water users recognize a strong connection between land and water, but the two are separate commodities under state law. Economic pressures make the sale of water rights attractive to individual ditch members, and although such sales impact the entire acequia, few associations have the money to deal with the problem. Acequias are also being pushed by the state to achieve irrigation efficiency, but current water law is based on a "use it or lose it" philosophy, and there is no incentive whatsoever to conserve. Acequia stakeholders fear that conservation measures such as ditch lining may destroy age-old cultural traditions and the character of

the land. What they want to see in the future is a society which "values and admires living on the land," where children "know where food comes from," and where people act responsibly to sustain agriculture *and* the ecosystem. Both acequia members and those outside traditional communities need to "plan as if drought is inevitable," and acequias suggest there are important civics lessons to be learned by studying how such communities have managed to survive for so many centuries.

Agriculture--Unlike areas where large scale agri-business is the norm, most farms in New Mexico's central valley are relatively small. Nevertheless, agriculture's economic significance is large: were agricultural irrigation to cease for a single year, estimates are the region would suffer \$195 million in economic losses. Technical aspects of the region's irrigation and drainage system are not well understood by the public, and growing knowledge about the hydrologic system and how agricultural water use fits into the picture has not been well communicated. Urbanization and "cultural erosion" are the biggest threats to agricultural lands. Participants envisioned a day when farming and its enviornmental benefits are recognized as part of the quality of life in the MRG, where there are established urban growth boundaries, where land is held for more than its "economic" (development) value, and where technology has helped to reduce agricultural water use by perhaps 50%. Achieving such goals will require public education about the role of farming, a more efficient irrigation delivery system, and legislation that supports greenbelt tax exemptions, local comprehensive plans, farmland preservation, and instream flows for the benefit of the environment. In addition, agricultural and environmental groups will have to

working coalitions.

Hydrology--MRG aquifers form a complex system of subsurface water that moves down the valley with intermittent connections to the river. Much remains unknown about local recharge and storage capability, and how drawdowns affect future water availability, riparian vegetation, land subsidence. As the City of Albuquerque switches to surface water effluent reuse to meet municipal needs, the aquifer is likely to be seen as a drought reserve, and if Aquifer Recharge & Retrieval becomes a reality, at least some of the region's supply could be stored below ground instead of in large reservoirs where evaporation losses are substantial. Options which might be taken to protect and preserve the aquifer include slowing runoff, reducing the amount of paving, and inducing evapotranspiration where recharge potential is greatest; strengthening water conservation regulations; harvesting rainwater; discouraging sod lawns; instituting impact fees for new development; and adopting rate structures that reflect the true value of water.

Economic Development--People need to have a correct picture of what it means to live in a semi-arid place, and such education should begin with those who are already here. Unless the general standard of living is raised, few will make water conservation a priority. Economic development depends on growth, and a limited water supply means there is a limit to growth. The group felt MRG planners should be conservative when estimating available resources; they suggested that current development patterns are not sustainable. Concerns were voiced about the impacts of development on agriculture, the environment, and the ability of

themselves. To support economic growth while making water use in the region more sustainable, we will need to agree on what kind of economic development we want. Missing partners need to be brought to the planning table, especially public officials with clout, and water experts should serve on all economic development committees. Reuse and conservation should be encouraged in all sectors, and information that reflects the total water picture should be communicated to those who want to relocate here.

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Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly



**Middle Rio Grande
Council of Governments
of New Mexico**

317 Commercial N.E., Suite 300
Albuquerque, N.M. 87102 (505) 247-1750



Middle Rio Grande Water Chronicle

The Newsletter of the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly October 2001

Regional Water Plan Takes Shape

Several years ago, in response to growing concerns that water supplies for the state's most populous region were inadequate to meet current and future demands, water managers, scientists, farmers, environmentalists, development interests and other concerned citizens initiated a regional water planning process for the Middle Rio Grande. Supported by a mandate from the Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) for regional water planning, they formed the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly, appointed a representative body known as the Action Committee, and entered into a formal partnership with the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments (MRGCOG). Through technical studies and public outreach, the Action Committee began developing the scientific and cultural foundation of a regional water plan.

In the last year a mission statement, water planning goals, and an outline for the plan have been developed. The mission statement clearly states how the region's water problems are to be addressed: Balance Water Use with Renewable Supply. Because renewable supplies are limited and demand already exceeds supply, fulfilling the plan's mission statement will require reductions in the demand for water. The task confronting the citizens of the Middle Rio Grande, therefore, is to decide how to achieve these reductions.

In the coming months we will be presenting this question to the community. To assist with the decision-making process, the Action Committee and MRGCOG are finalizing a study on future water use trends, finalizing a list of potential water saving alternatives, and developing a 'water balancing worksheet.' The worksheet will present our current known water budget, predict the future water budget if we make no changes, and allow anyone to

'pencil in' what they think our future water budget should be. These and other tools will provide for the evaluation of public preferences in light of their technical, economic, environmental, and practical feasibility.

If all goes according to schedule, the regional water plan will be completed June, 2003. The completed plan will then be submitted to the ISC for its approval, and to local governments for their adoption and implementation.

This edition of the Rio Grande Chronicle reviews recent accomplishments and identifies the work yet to come. We invite your participation as the regional water plan begins to take shape.

Bob Wessely, Action Committee Chair

Mission and Goals Adopted

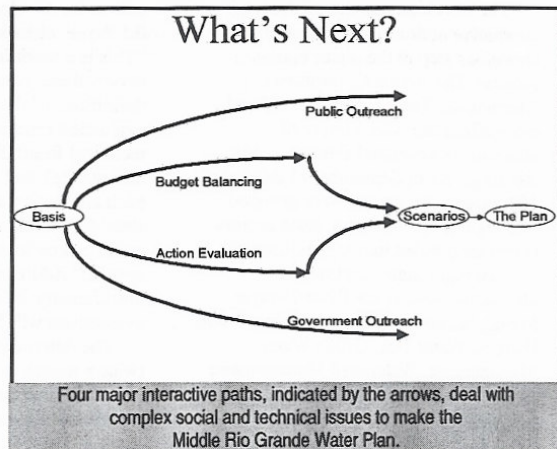
Earlier this year the Water Assembly's Action Committee and MRGCOG's Water Resources Board adopted a mission statement and goals for the regional water plan. Numerous objectives for the plan also have been proposed.

The mission and goals were developed from public comments received at a series of meetings that were held last year in the three county planning area (Valencia, Bernalillo, and Sandoval). At a regional forum held in November, the comments were consolidated into a single mission statement and set of goals by the

Action Committee, facilitator Lucy Moore, and staff from MRGCOG.

The mission statement, which will guide the creation of the regional water plan, declares that the plan will "Balance water use with renewable supply." The plan's goals are as follows:

- A. Ensure that the plan is fulfilled through a fair, open, and inclusive public planning and implementation process.
- B. Preserve water for a healthy Rio Grande ecosystem.
- C. Preserve water for the region's agricultural, cultural, and historical values.
- D. Preserve water for economic and urban vitality.
- E. Preserve water for the qualities of life valued by residents in the region.
- F. Develop broad public and official awareness of water facts and issues, especially the limited nature of water resources.
- G. Conserve water.
- H. Promote a system of water laws and processes that support the regional water plan and its implementation.
- I. Provide appropriate water quality for each use.
- J. Manage water demand consistent with the stated mission.



Community Conversations Lead to Goals, Alternatives

The mission of the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly is to develop a plan of sustainable water management strategies through an open, inclusive, participatory planning process. Such a process will help ensure that the regional water plan truly reflects the interests and values of the region's citizens.

To that end, the Action Committee of the MRGCOG hosted a series of 'community conversations' on water last year. Between July and September, eight community conversations were held in Las Lunas, Albuquerque, Rio Rancho and the Town of Bernalillo. These meetings led to the creation of a mission statement, goals, and a list of proposed objectives for the regional plan (see page 1). Additional meetings were held in December to begin developing preliminary alternatives for balancing water supply and demand.

Future community conversations will focus on using the list of alternatives, a water balancing worksheet, and future water demand projections to begin zeroing in on specific options for regional water management. Meeting dates and locations will be announced soon.

Alternatives for Managing Water

The development and analysis of alternative actions is an essential and enormous step in the water planning process. The Action Committee's Alternatives Team recently listed and categorized the wide variety of alternatives generated through public meetings. As of September of this year, 193 alternative actions were grouped into eight major sections. Each section is further divided into subsections.

The eight major sections of alternative actions are River/Bosque Management; Agricultural, Cultural, and Historic Water Use; Urban Water Management; Watershed Management; Community Management; Public

What's in the Plan? Start with the Annotated Table of Contents

The Water Assembly's Action Committee has prepared a detailed outline for the regional water plan in the form of an Annotated Table of Contents. More than a simple list of one-line titles, it includes brief descriptions of the intended contents of each subsection of the water plan. This document, along with the plan's mission statement and goals, is the beginning of the regional water plan for the Middle Rio Grande.

The major section headings of the Annotated Table of Contents are shown below. Although it contains no meaningful water planning data at this time, it is intended to be an evolving, regularly updated repository of such data. Comments and suggestions from the public will be incorporated or reported in future versions.

0. Summaries
 - Executive Summary
 - General Summary
1. Introduction
2. Middle Rio Grande Region - Past and Present
3. Strategy Chosen to Maximize Public Involvement
4. Public Involvement in Planning Process
5. Current Legal Issues
6. Water Resources Assessment for the Planning Region
7. Current Water Demand and No-Action Future Water Demand
8. Water Plan Alternative Actions and Scenarios
9. Criteria and Evaluations of the Scenarios
10. Conclusions and Recommendations
11. Implementation

The full Annotated Table of Contents will soon be available for review on the assembly's website at www.waterassembly.org. Printed copies are available at the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments, 317 Commercial NE, Albuquerque, NM 87102. The phone number there is 247-1750.

Integration with Existing Plans.

The list of preliminary alternatives is still under development. According to Ed Payne, chairperson of the team, "This is a work in progress. We will review these groupings, prepare definitions of the subgroups, finalize the evaluation criteria, (which includes technical feasibility and public acceptance), and begin to rate and rank each alternative action. In addition, we should be thinking about what studies could be conducted to facilitate the review." Additional input is welcome until January 2002, when the evaluations will begin.

The Alternatives Team is meeting twice a month to complete its tasks. For more information, see the working

Be Involved, Stay Informed

As work on the regional water plan moves into high gear, public participation in the planning process will become more important than ever. Be involved and stay informed through meetings and on-line communications.

Got E-mail? The Assembly has a 'list server' where messages about various activities, opinions and articles are distributed. To receive messages, send an e-mail to majordomo@cabq.gov. In the body of the e-mail, type the words "subscribe mrgwp." To send a message, address it to mrgwp@cabq.gov.

See the next two pages for meeting schedules and contact information.

Water Plan Meetings

The meetings of the Action Committee and the five working teams are open to the public. Each team has its own e-mail list for participants. If you are interested in a team's progress, contact the chair and ask to be included on its list.

ACTION COMMITTEE

Meetings are monthly on the 3rd Wednesday of the month, 5:30 – 7:30 pm.

Site: Conference Room on first floor, Department of Agriculture Building, 6200 Jefferson NE, Albuquerque

Executive Committee

Meetings are twice monthly, Fridays, 3:00 – 5:00 pm.
Contact: Bob Prendergast, V. President
E-mail: rnptep@uswest.net
Phone: 857-9225

WORKING TEAMS

Administration and Finance Team

Contact: Bob Prendergast
E-mail: rnptep@uswest.net
Phone: 857-9225

Alternatives Team

Contact: Ed Payne
Meetings are twice monthly, Tuesdays, 6:30 pm.
E-mail: re_payne@yahoo.com
Phone: 797-4306

Analysis Team

Contact: Sterling Grogan
Meetings are on the 4th Tuesday.
E-mail: Grogan@mrgcd.dst.nm.us
Phone: 247-0235

External Coordination / Government Outreach Team

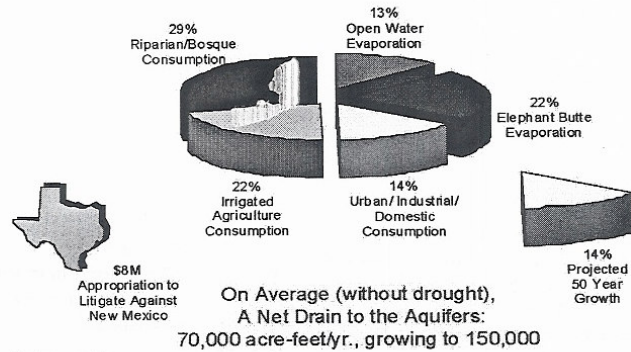
Contact: Danny Hernandez
E-mail: danny@swcp.com
Phone: 244-8391

Public Participation and Communication Team

Contact: Kevin Bean
Meetings are on the 1st and 3rd Mondays, 5:00 to 7:00 pm.
E-mail: surich@earthlink.net
Phone: 293-9208

The Serious Mutual Problem

The whole pie is now being used;
Any increase in one slice must reduce another



The Water Assembly

The New Action Committee

The Action Committee is the representative body of the full Water Assembly. It meets monthly, and plays a major role in the development of the regional water plan. As such, the Action Committee's makeup is intended to reflect – within the constraint of limiting the group to a manageable size – the major stakeholders and broad range of interests in the Middle Rio Grande Valley. At the June 23, 2001 meeting of the Water Assembly, the following members were elected to the Action Committee. Their group affiliations are listed where applicable.

OFFICERS

(Elected by previous Action Committee, April 2001)

Bob Wessely, chair
Bob Prendergast, vice chair
Betty Behrend, secretary; Los Lunas Utility Director
Howard Stone, treasurer; Bohannon Huston

CONSTITUENCY GROUPS

Agricultural, Cultural & Historic Water Use Advocates

Janet Jarratt, co-chair; Valencia County Citizens for Responsible Growth
Lynn Montgomery, co-chair; Mayordomo, La Rosa de Castilla Acequia Association
Jessie Fitzgerald; Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District
Mike Wirtz; Rio Puerco and Rio Jemez Steering Committee
Angelo Baca; Valencia County Farm and Livestock Bureau

Environmental Advocates

Jessica Ciddio, co-chair; 1000 Friends of New Mexico
Tom Luebben, co-chair; Native Lands Institute
Kevin Bean; NM Public Interest Research Group
Steve Harris; Rio Grande Restoration
Ed Payne

continued on next page

MIDDLE RIO GRANDE WATER ASSEMBLY

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Ms. Michele Minnis
Economics Building
University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM 87131-1217

87131+1217



continued from page 3

Specialists

Lee Brown, chair; Economist
Corinne Brooks; District Conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation District
Brian Burnett; Bohannon Huston
Michelle Henrie; Lawyer, Rodey Law Firm
John Shomaker; Hydrologist, John Shomaker & Associates, Inc.

Urban Users and Economic Development Advocates

Eileen Grevey Hillson, chair; National Association of Industrial and Office Properties
Fred Ambrogi; Westland Development Co.
Charles Barnhart; Economic Forum
Dave Hill; Lewinger-Hamilton Real Estate Management Co.
William Keleher; Lawyer, Keleher Law firm

Water Managers

Bob Swartwout, chair; New Mexico Utilities Inc.
Matt Holmes; NM Rural Water Users Association
Mary Murnane; Bernalillo County Public Works
John Stomp; City of Albuquerque Water Resources Division
Larry Webb; City of Rio Rancho Public Works

Are you interested in getting your future *MRG Water Chronicle* by e-mail?
Send your e-mail address to Kevin Bean at surich@earthlink.net. Note in your message to send the MRGWA newsletter by e-mail.



Participate on the Web

www.WaterAssembly.org

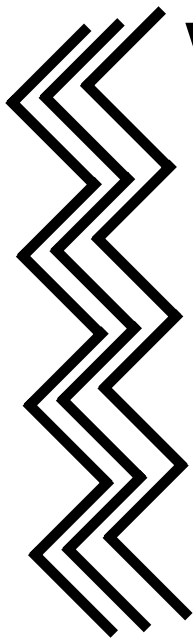
It will soon be possible to participate in the planning process through the Water Assembly's website. Planned revisions to the existing site will allow the public to review and comment on the water plan as it develops. We expect to make these changes by the end of the year.

More Water on the Web

www.NMWaterConnections.org

Organizations and individuals are encouraged to visit this web site for New Mexicans to learn about water issues and exchange with others. A calendar is available for any posting related to water planning. Many Assembly meetings are posted there. The site contains other features, including a directory of organizations working on water issues.

Middle Rio Grande Water Chronicle
Contributions: Kevin Bean
Editing/Production: Joanne McEntire
Printing: MRGCOG



Water Chronicles

December 2002

Downstream from here for water management planning process

The Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly is entering the final phase for developing a regional water management plan. After five years of dedicated effort from Water Assembly volunteers, with their partner, the Mid Region Council of Governments, support from the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission, and with significant participation from Middle Rio Grande residents, the regional plan is slated for completion in 2003. As we approach this milestone, we once again ask for your help and input. Throughout the next several months there will be numerous opportunities for you to attend forums and community conversations, provide comments, and volunteer your time and talents to help the Water Assembly finalize the water management plan.

This issue of **Water Chronicles** recaps where we've been and highlights where we are going. It also provides information to help you get ready to participate!

Our roots

In 1997 the New Mexico State Engineer called upon the University of New Mexico to create a group to develop a regional water plan. Following two public meetings, the entity we know as the Water Assembly was officially created in November 1997. In mid-1998 the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments (now MRCOG) formed the Water Resources Board (WRB). In December 1998, MRCOG and the Water Assembly signed a Memorandum of Understanding declaring that the Water Assembly would develop a regional water plan and the WRB would adopt and implement the plan.

Since its inception, the Water Assembly has amassed the technical information necessary to develop a water plan. Qualified volunteers and consultants have created a water budget, a water supply study, and a current and historic water demand study. Additionally, researchers completed an analysis on the effects of allowing present day water use and policy to continue unchanged. Through a very public process, the Water Assembly has compiled 44 alternative actions that could be included in the management plan. The public has had the opportunity to select their preferred alternatives and those alternatives are currently being rated for feasibility and overall impact.

What's next

Based upon prior public work, the Water Assembly is beginning the process of creating scenarios—combinations of alternative actions—that can be integrated into a draft management plan. Like all Assembly activities, there are ample opportunities for you to help create scenarios and numerous chances to comment on those that others have suggested. There will also be meetings dedicated to reviewing the actual draft plan and incorporating public comments into the final document. Please join us as we enter the crucial final phase of developing a regional water management plan that will *balance water use with a renewable supply*.

***News from the
Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly***

Inside.....March Forum — Recap of Community Conversations and 6th Annual Assembly — Greetings from Rio Puerco/Rio Jemez watersheds — Water Balancing Exercise — Working Team reports

Message from the Chair

Water is the most serious issue in the Middle Rio Grande Region. We are overdrawing the aquifer 55,000 acre-feet each year. Our task is to figure out how to have sufficient, affordable, clean water to meet our human and environmental needs, while maintaining our desired New Mexican lifestyles.

The Water Assembly and its partner the Mid Region Council of Governments have created a planning process that is open, inclusive and participatory. The regional plan that we will complete in 2003 will reflect technical feasibility, solid scientific data, and the region's diversity.

This newsletter highlights work the Water Assembly has completed and provides information to help you contribute to the final phase of the planning process.

Over the next several months, we will request your input as we review various management scenarios. These scenarios combine alternative actions that were presented in 2002. At the same time, Sandia National Laboratories is continuing to develop a model that will let us see the impacts that various scenarios have on the water supply.

We look forward to working with you to ensure we create an effective regional water management plan.

Bob Wessely, Chair, Water Assembly

Message from the WRB

"*Balance Water Use with Renewable Supply*" is a formidable goal for the Middle Rio Grande Regional Water Plan. We have less than a year to complete, formally accept and submit a regional water plan to the Interstate Stream Commission. I acknowledge the hard work and long hours that Water Assembly volunteers, the Rio Puerco and Rio Jemez sub-region volunteers and MRCOG personnel have invested in this vital project.

The unique challenge to all participants is to develop a plan that acknowledges the region's diversity and reaches the greatest benefit toward a healthy and prosperous economy and environment. We must *all* reach agreement on the final plan. The WRB will be working hard to review sections of the plan as they are completed and to become better acquainted with all elements of the overall plan to insure a healthy balance of viewpoints acceptable to the approving agencies.

Time is short and the level of effort required to produce the plan is enormous, but doable. We look forward to a continuing productive working relationship, knowing that the hard issues and resolution to those issues still lie ahead. Keep up the hard work, your input is invaluable!

Ted Asbury, Chair, Water Resources Board



March Forum to focus on actions

Mark your calendars and plan to attend the **Regional Forum on Saturday, March 1** on the University of New Mexico campus. Forum participants will hear the results from a feasibility study on the alternative actions being considered for inclusion in the **Regional Water Management Plan** and will see a unique model being developed for "seeing" relationships among various water use choices.

At various public meetings throughout the region, the Water Assembly collected ideas for potential actions to include in the management plan. Water Assembly volunteers organized the suggested actions into 44 discrete options and prepared an initial analysis of each action regarding its benefits, consequences, and implications. Attendees at the 5th Community Conversations had the opportunity to review this initial analysis and to select their most and least preferred actions.

In October 2002, the Water Assembly and the Mid Region Council of Governments hired consulting firm DB Stephens & Associates (with funding from the Interstate Stream Commission) to complete a more in-depth assessment of 25 of the alternative actions. At the January Forum, various experts will present their results and

provide an opportunity for you to raise questions and to rank the alternative actions. The Water Assembly hopes to complete further analyses of those alternative actions not included in the consultant in-depth review.

Additionally, Sandia National Laboratories will **demonstrate the model** that they are developing cooperatively with the Water Assembly. The model is designed to help people understand and evaluate the effects of possible water use scenarios. These scenarios are collections of alternative actions that can work together to meet the region's water budgeting needs.

The March Forum will provide an excellent opportunity to hear what has been accomplished and to be sure that **your ideas and concerns are included** in the planning effort.

The meeting will begin at 9:00 a.m. and end at 4:00 p.m. Lunch will be provided.



Water is the best of all things.
Pindar (c. 522-438 B.C.) *Olympian Odes*

4th Series of Community Conversations - March 2002

How Will We Share the Water?

The Assembly dared folks to balance the water budget at the 4th Series of Community Conversations. Using the interactive computer model built with the assistance of Sandia Labs, participants got a taste of some of the issues involved in balancing the budget. Working with the Water Balancing Exercise, citizens could better understand the challenges of meeting future water demands. Overall, the computer model was well received, although concern was expressed that it was not realistic enough. Some of the comments were:

- What are the impacts to recreation, environment, economy from making changes in the pool size or depth at Elephant Butte?
- Tell us what the valley would really look like with all the changes we made in the exercise.
- Balancing is more difficult than it seems and there are a diversity of opinions
- Elephant Butte = highest potential gain, most difficult to change
- Cost-benefit links needed, to show real life impacts
- The exercise does not account for the influence of politics and money nor silvery minnow.
- We are all in this together, and
- We have the talent to solve the problems.

The input from the attendees with respect to the model and the need for more and better information has been most beneficial in guiding the process. The model is much more robust, being readied for more public events!

5th Series of Community Conversations - September 2002

Which Choices Work for Us? Picking the pieces to create our water plan

As the monsoon season waned, residents throughout the Middle Rio Grande region gathered for more conversation.

Representatives from Sandia demonstrated that model users can select how much water is allocated to various uses, such as residential or agricultural, and how changing the relationships among these uses affects aquifer levels and surface water flows. The demonstration prompted lively discussion about the model and designers responded to participant questions.

Next, attendees heard from the Water Assembly Advocacy Groups who reported their preferred manage-

ment actions from the 44 possible alternative actions that had been developed via previous public venues.

For the finale, participants were given four blue dots and four black dots and asked to place the blue dots on their most preferred actions and the black dots on those actions that they least preferred. In addition to “voting” at the Conversations, everyone on the Water Assembly mailing list received a pre-printed post card to mail back to the Water Assembly with their selections. Here are some of the results from the “voting” process:

Most Liked

<u>Alternative Action</u>	<u>Positive votes</u>
Restore bosque habitat	96
Adopt policies to integrate land use, transportation and water planning	59
Develop coordinated/sustainable growth management plan	51
Implement local water conservation plans and programs	51

Least Liked

<u>Alternative Action</u>	<u>Negative votes</u>
Meter all supply wells	78
Conduct research on water supply enhancement techniques	71
Change state law to include in-stream flow as beneficial use	46
Acquire additional rights/import water	45

Least Attention (fewest responses)

<u>Alternative Action</u>	<u>Total responses</u>
Implement local/regional watershed management plans	4
Address groundwater/surface water interactions in rights statuses	9
Ensure public involvement in water planning	11
Develop economic potential of non-native species removal, local industry output	11

Clearly, there is tremendous support for bosque restoration. This concurs with results from public opinion surveys. Interestingly, while there is support for restoring bosque habitat, there is not strong support for changing State law to allow in-stream flow to count as beneficial use in New Mexico. This raises questions about where the river would receive the water necessary for bosque restoration if it does not receive dedicated in-stream flow.

Additionally, there is tremendous support for

coordinating various planning efforts in growth, land use, transportation and water. Yet, there is not support for metering wells, which would provide data necessary for effective planning and coordination among plans and there only four votes (all positive) cast for implementing watershed management plans.

Finally, there is little attention granted to ensuring that the water planning process includes public involvement. This is quite likely because the people casting votes were already participating, hence they may have felt that public involvement was ensured and wanted to highlight other actions with their votes.

Constituency Groups tried their hands at balancing the budget

Last spring, the Water Assembly’s Constituency Groups tried to balance the budget in the Water Balancing Exercise (WBE) in accord with their focus.

Each group attained a balanced water budget, but followed different paths. Some decreased Elephant Butte’s surface size. Others decreased non-native plants to decrease consumptive use in the riparian areas. All imposed more conservation on urban uses, but some groups had more growth in the urban sector and reduced lands under cultivation. Closing conduits aided with evaporative losses but resulted in losses to the shallow aquifer. All in all, the groups found that there were a number of trade-offs involved in balancing the budget.

Now, the Constituency Groups are reviewing these results in preparation for the next activity, being scenario building. Members of the different Constituency Groups are going to construct scenarios, starting from the results of the Water Balancing Exercise (WBE), to be centered

To see complete summary reports from the 4th and 5th Community Conversations, including complete results from the water balancing exercise and “voting”, visit the Water Assembly web page: www.WaterAssembly.org under the Current Events/Activities/Information section OR contact Mike Trujillo at the MRCOG 247-1750.

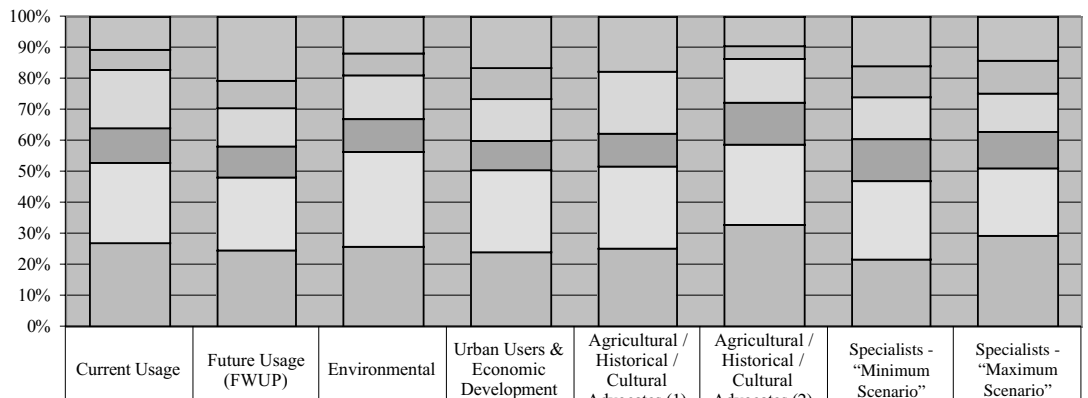


primarily on the main users in the region. Each Scenario Development Committee will:

- Present a vision of the regional future which balances future water supplies and demands in accordance with the interim mission and goals of the regional plan;
- Tell a plausible story that captures that vision at the same time as it balances supply and demand;
- Gather and “size” alternative actions into a logical package consistent with the story and vision; and
- Fix a time period for achieving balance and describe how the region would adapt to a sustained drought consistent with the vision.

Their efforts will be highlighted as part of the upcoming 6th Series of Community Conversations!

*Balancing the Budget
Constituency
Group Preferences
(in acre feet)
compares the percentage
each value
contributes to a total
across categories*



	Current Usage	Future Usage (FWUP)	Environmental	Urban Users & Economic Development	Agricultural / Historical / Cultural Advocates (1)	Agricultural / Historical / Cultural Advocates (2)	Specialists - "Minimum Scenario"	Specialists - "Maximum Scenario"
Domestic Uses	57000	118000	57000	82000	84884	40000	69057	69057
Office, Business, Commercial, and Industrial Uses	33000	52000	33000	48000		18250	42197	54101
Irrigated Agriculture Uses	100000	72000	68000	65000	94500	61200	59405	59405
Open Water Uses (Other than EB)	60000	60000	50000	48000	50000	60000	60000	60000
Riparian Uses	135000	135000	145000	130000	126000	112500	107476	107476
Elephant Butte Lake Evaporation	144000	144000	124000	117000	118616	144000	95276	144000

Greetings from the Rio Puerco y Rio Jemez Watersheds

When Water Assembly representatives contacted people here to ask if we'd been consulted about the state water plan, we realized, we had not. We're rural people, not much given to meetings, but what united us pretty quick was concern for our watersheds, because, of course, they are the source of our water and much of the water for the Middle Rio Grande planning district.

We know we'd have to be heard if the state plan was to be prevented from squeezing us dry, and in the end, squeezing the rest of you dry. Our mission, to restore the watersheds and increase water production, is historically based. Photographs of one hundred years ago show tall prairie grass and lagoons in the Cuba area. It was considered the "breadbasket" of northern New Mexico. Most of the damage is human-caused. It can, therefore, be reversed.

To that end we (representatives from most small communities, the pueblos and the Navajo reservation) have met, formed a steering committee and created a Joint Watershed Independent Planning Sub-region. We recently signed a Joint Powers Agreement with the Mid Region Council of Governments, who are the fiscal agent for the Middle Rio Grande Planning Region. We are members of the Water Assembly and the Rio Puerco Management Committee. We also have a representative on the MRCOG Water Resources Board.

We have held public conversations in both watersheds, and established goals. From those goals we are in the process of identifying preferred alternatives to be worked up as various scenarios.

Meanwhile, the Rio Puerco Management Committee is funding restoration projects on the Puerco, and the Jemez side has received a large grant from the Federal Government to study the effects of wells drilled in Rio Rancho on the watershed aquifers. Hydrologic studies have shown that if the aquifers are not recharged, there are no springs and no water in the streams. Fully 90% of instream flow after the snow pack melts is re-emergent ground water.

We will continue to formulate scenarios, with the intent of preserving the watershed's unique communities and restoring the watershed's ability to absorb and hold water, releasing it slowly downstream for our benefit and the benefit of the communities below us.

For additional information on the Rio Puerco y Rio Jemez Joint Watershed Committee, contact:

Emmett Cart - emmett@sulphurcanyon.com

Marion Woolf - Marion@CircleARanch.info

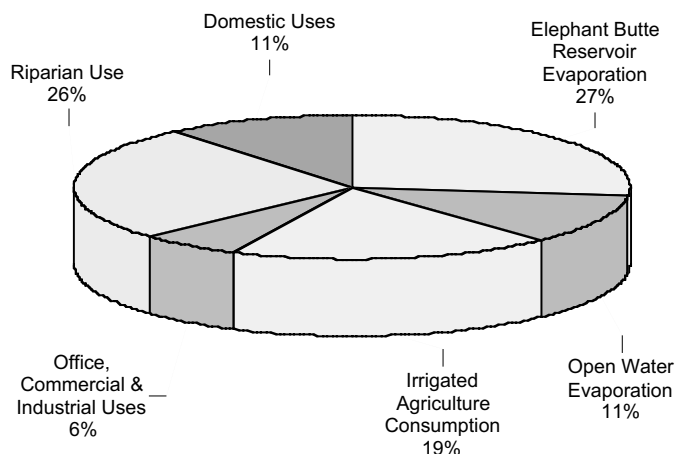
CS&WD Office Manager Peggy Ohler - pegohler@yahoo.com

6th Annual Water Assembly tries to balance budgets and heed voices

In April, Middle Rio Grande regional water planners held the sixth annual Water Assembly to update residents on the group's progress, and to demonstrate a water balance model being developed in conjunction with Sandia National Laboratories.

Water Assembly volunteers presented information about the region's water flow as background for using the water budget model. New Mexico's annual percentage of the Rio Grande as measured at Otowi gauge, tributary inflows between Otowi and Elephant Butte, and water imported from the San Juan River basin, make up the Middle Rio Grande's water supply. The state is experiencing its worst water supply constraints in decades. The river channel conditions are implicated in endangered species habitat issues today. The MRG annual depletion of groundwater from finite aquifers affords us a "transitory" water supply; meanwhile, it incurs a debt to the river that eventually must be repaid.

On average, the MRG has a net deficit each year of about 55,000 acre feet of water. As reported at the Annual Assembly, here is where the region's water goes:



With a fixed water "income," and mounting stress from population growth, drought, endangered species needs, and litigation-prone neighbors seeking a larger share of the southwest's limited resources, balancing the region's water budget is anything but an empty exercise. Sandia National Laboratory is developing a mathematical model to mimic the way the Rio Grande works. Historic data will be used to project the future, to simulate the effects of different environmental conditions and water management strategies, and to help identify gaps in our knowledge of the Rio Grande's hydrology and ecosystem.

The earliest version of the model allows users to manipulate any of several system outflows to determine the effect on the water balance. Outflow categories include Elephant Butte evaporation; riparian evapotranspiration;

“Action Committee” drives process

agricultural use; Socorro/Sierra deliveries; open water evaporation; and residential, business and government uses. A more sophisticated dynamic simulation model is under way that links ground and surface water systems.

In addition to seeing the model and better understanding the importance of balancing our water budget, the Annual Assembly is a place for gathering input and listening to all perspectives concerning the region’s water. As the plan progresses the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly hopes to have the necessary feedback to reach a plan that most people can agree on. This means hearing the voices from the subregions and tribes. At the sixth annual assembly rural and tribal groups participated.

Marion Woolf, a representative of the Rio Puerco / Rio Jemez Watershed Committee, told MRG water planners that some families have lived in the rural subregions for a century or more, and that confronted with downstream growth and development, they feel they live in a “sacrifice area.”

Gilbert Sandoval, also of the Rio Puerco / Rio Jemez Watershed Committee says, “Drawdown of the water table in Bernalillo, Rio Rancho and Albuquerque is beginning to affect our high mountain aquifers.” The Committee hopes to study problems such as the issuing of unlimited domestic well permits by the Office of the State Engineer, and the overgrown condition of forests in the upper watershed which reduces the amount of aquifer recharge and precipitation capture for the region.

Fidel Lorenzo of the Pueblo of Acoma, reminded Assembly participants that the Pueblos’ right to self-governance is recognized by both federal and state law, and includes determining what constitutes a beneficial use of water. Tribes were accorded “water to meet their needs as they may change over the years,” he said. There is increased domestic water use on tribal lands, and an increasing population. Lorenzo expressed concern that planners have not taken into account Pueblo water rights. “Waters still untapped and unused by the tribes cannot be accessed by non-natives in their regional water plans; neither can they be enjoined to meet interstate compacts or international treaties,” he said.

A 29-member Action Committee directs Water Assembly activities. The Action Committee meets on the 3rd Wednesday of every month, and like all Water Assembly activities, the meetings are open to the public. Action Committee members reflect the region’s diversity and include:

Farmers	Private & public utility managers
Economists	Environmental attorneys
Engineers	Developers
Physicists	Hydrologists
Real estate agents	Acequia parciantes

The Action Committee is organized in five constituency groups:

- Urban Users and Economic Development Advocates
- Agriculture, Historical, and Cultural Water Use Advocates
- Environmental Advocates
- Specialists
- Managers

Each constituency group has five voting members on the full Action Committee. (The other four voting members are the Action Committee officers.) The first three groups “advocate” for water uses aligned with their group. The Specialist group includes technical experts who help ensure that the scientific and technical aspects of the plan are accurate. The Managers group provides input on water management issues and policy-relevant aspects of the plan.

All Water Assembly activities and decisions are filtered through this Committee to ensure that the plan is accurate, realistic and most importantly, that all interests in the region have a voice in the final plan.

Currently the Action Committee’s attention is focused on creating “scenarios” that combine various alternative actions and reflect a “vision” from the urban, agricultural, and/or environmental advocates.

If you are interested in the scenario building exercise and would like to assist the Action Committee, contact Bob Wessely, 867-3889, wessely@sciso.com



Tell a Friend

After you have read your issue of **Water Chronicles**, why not pass it along to a friend? The Water Assembly is dedicated to developing our regional water plan through an open, inclusive and participatory process. That means the more people who are involved, the better!

The Water Assembly needs your help!

The *work* of the Water Assembly happens in the Working Teams. The teams meet once or twice a month and are always happy to see new faces. There is a team that could use your knowledge and skills, so get involved in helping to plan for our water future!

Cooperative Modeling Team (CMT)

Celina Jones, Facilitator JONESCE@law.unm.edu

CMT is developing a model with Sandia Labs to quantify the consequences of alternative strategies. CMT is also working to develop an interactive tool for education and participation in water resource issues.

Alternatives Working Team (AWT or Alts)

Ed Payne, Chair re_payne@yahoo.com

Via various public venues the Water Assembly received more than 200 suggestions for what to include in the plan. The AWT grouped these into 44 alternative actions and wrote descriptions for each. The AWT has been working, with contractor assistance, to evaluate feasibility for these actions.

Public Participation and Communication Working Team (PPC)

Kevin Bean, Chair, surich@earthlink.net

The PPC coordinates the Community Conversations, the Annual Assembly and other public meetings. The PPC has also prepared media kits, arranged various media events, participated in water events, and tries to get the word out about the water planning process.

Technical Analysis Working Team (A-Team)

Sterling Grogan, Chair Grogan@mrgcd.com

The job of the A-Team is ensure that the information and numbers used by the Water Assembly have been reviewed for technical certainty.

External Coordination Working Team (ECWT)

Pauline Gubbels, Chair mpgubbels@earthlink.net

The ECWT has been contacting federal, state and local agencies and officials to let them know about the regional water planning effort. This should provide a link, along with the Water Resources Board, to ensure necessary input as well as acceptance of the plan.

Administration & Finance Team (AFT)

Bob Prendergast, Chair, rnptep@uswest.net

The AFT is responsible for assuring that the administrative and financial functions and tasks of the Water Assembly are accomplished. These include preparing the Program Schedule; assisting in preparing Requests for Proposals; preparing official Policies and Procedures; preparing the Operating Budget; maintaining the Website, and other day-to-day tasks.

Here are ways to get more information about participating in the Working Team activities:

Contact Working Team leaders, e-mails above.

ListServ: Send a message to majordomo@cabq.gov with "subscribe mrgwp" in the body text. Leave the subject line blank.

Web site: www.WaterAssembly.org

Bob Wessely, Assembly Chair, 867-3889 wessely@sciso.com

Bob Prendergast, Assembly Vice Chair, 857-9225 rnptep@uswest.net

Mike Trujillo, MRCOG, 247-1750 MTrujillo@mrgcog.org

Muchas gracias to Sandia National Labs, UNM Upton Transboundary Resource Center, UNM Water Resources Program, Science & Technology Park at UNM, Rio Rancho, Intel, Exxon Mobile, AMAFGA, and most of all, to the volunteers who have invested hundreds of hours to make the regional water planning process the success that it is.



Water on the Web

For all you “surfers” out there, here are some interesting sites related to water.

Water Saver's Page

www.h2house.org

Find ways to reduce water use in your home

World's Water

www.worldwater.org

Information about water resources worldwide

Water News

www.uswaternews.com

Water-related news from around the country.

Western Water Policy Review Advisory Commission

www.den.doi.gov.wwprac

Report on western water issues and recommendations for future policy.

New Mexico Water Supply, Weather, Snowpack and Climate Information

www.seo.state.nm.us/water-info/ISC-H2O/climate.htm

New Mexico Drought Conditions

nm.water.usgs.gov/drought/index.html

Mark Your Calendars for Future Water Assembly Activities

Action Committee Meetings

Normally the 3rd Wednesday of every month, 5:30

Regional Forum

Saturday, March 1, 2003, 9:00 - 4:00

University of New Mexico

Learn the results of the feasibility study for the water management alternatives.

6th Community Conversations

April 2003

Attendees will focus on reviewing scenarios before trying their hand at creating them!

Annual Assembly & Regional Forum

May 3, 2003

Help select the preferred scenario to meet the plan's mission and goals, plus select new members to the Action Committee

7th Community Conversations & Regional Forum

Date to be announced

This series of meetings will present the draft Middle Rio Grande Regional Water Plan for review, comment and acceptance.



Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly

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Working with you to balance water use with renewable supply.