



**Comments from New Mexico State Water Plan Public Meeting:
Deming
Convention Center, 1500 West Historic Route 66
Tuesday, August 12, 2003; 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.**

The public meeting in Deming was the 15th of 29 public meetings scheduled to gather public input in the initial phase of the State Water Plan. The meetings were organized in order to gather the views and values of people throughout New Mexico about water, as well as information about particular issues in their communities and recommendations for matters to be included in the State Water Plan.

Introduction:

Planning and Communication Division Director Rhea Graham presented an overview of the State Water Plan to 43 participants and selected technical information to set the context for the meetings. The public meetings are “listening meetings,” since the purpose is to hear what is of concern to New Mexico communities. The Interstate Stream Commission has organized 29 meetings, four of them on Indian tribal lands. The Interstate Stream Commission and the Office of the State Engineer identified five major topic areas that should be the primary areas of discussion during the public meetings, all seeking to determine what the public’s values are regarding them. The discussion also sought public input on mechanisms that would be possible to address the topic areas and the public’s values about them.

The five areas for discussion are:

- Stewardship
- Balancing Supply and Demand
- Drought
- Water Administration
- Funding Sources

Stewardship:

- We should be metered, we should use desert landscaping, we should look at other ways of farming – hydroponics... we must be responsible for what God gave us; We cannot accept that “this is the way we have always done it”

- Control the watersheds – wilderness study areas prevent our ability to work with the watersheds; should not ban grazing in watersheds; be proactive not reactive
- Control the amount of water that is flushed; urinals in homes could save a lot of water
- Water usage should be part of our social and cultural values
- What about encouraging rain barrels? Counties and states will be publishing info on gray water and on rain barrels; we should get incentives
- What about information on use of native grasses for landscaping? Need information on this
- Buffalo grass is good – see County Extension Agent for information
- Exploration of desalinization is important – we also need to re-channel water from water rich areas to water short areas plus we have two oceans – population is growing – we have to go further than turning the water off when you brush your teeth
- Want to encourage logging for watershed management – not clear cutting, but small local subsidized cutting
- Incentive - Legislation this year on a tax credit for water conservation efforts – also for industry
- Economic development should consider the replacement costs re lowering the aquifer as part of a project – example of Duke Energy
- Santa Fe requires new development to replace the effects via savings in aquifer or watershed
- Incentives only seem to relate to the high users of water – it should apply to all – people do not really understand the true meaning of conservation
- Decisions are made if there is money to be made – sometimes we need to just do a good thing
- Recycling used to be here but it had to be discontinued because we couldn't get rid of the trash

Balancing Supply and Demand:

- I don't understand all about water rights
- Water supports life
- We will go where the water is – wouldn't that work? People will leave where there isn't enough water
- Before people leave they are going to dry up the farms – demand will go up because of subdivisions – we should be metering the use – there is a big difference between domestic use and farm use – first should be the domestic wells – 3 acre-feet/year is not right for domestic wells
- The domestic wells don't use a lot of water – it is the irrigation wells that should be metered
- Farm produces a product – a subdivision is less valuable
- We need good technical data on supply and demand – it should be balanced so they are equal both ground and surface water – it should be kept in hydrological equilibrium

- State should be more responsible re monitoring the water table – have voluntary rules before there are mandatory rules...we need to know where we are – water is fossil water and we would need another ice age to replace it
- We need to know how to get a surplus before we grow and we should have an agreed upon average supply and usage – can't really balance it ...too many variables...aquifers are not being replenished; we need to do something to store water during surplus time so that we can have the water to use during dry times
- We are adjudicated – but the State Engineer lets everyone put a straw in the ground – what if we were like the Pecos – the junior user will get cut off, adjudicated people have the senior rights – they should be respected
- Correlate the long term precipitation with the supply; there also needs to be deep well testing on the extent of local aquifers – artesian water was found when drillers were looking for oil
- Economics of pumping water for agriculture is getting dire
- Office of the State Engineer stated they can only administer law that is on the books – does it need updating
- Adjudicated rights are private property
- Basin is closed; no new rights available; rights have to be marketed; Office of the State Engineer should balance supply with demand
- Domestic wells are the problem – represents a new demand; law needs to be changed to evaluate this – fees should take the impact to senior users into account – for five bucks you are giving someone a right that impinges on a senior right
- One of the things that would solve that is to buy a right from a senior holder for the domestic well
- In the Gila-San Francisco – there should be household use from the well only – extra use must have a water right
- What about someone like Duke Energy that bought water right from folks – \$700 to \$1200 per acre-foot – should they be responsible to the adjudicated water right holder
- You are talking about water banking; free market is already here; Deming just bought 2300 acre-feet and have plans to buy 4000 they are trying to monopolize it – water banking should have controls; Phelps Dodge is an example of this too
- I thought you had to put a water right to beneficial use; how can this work with the rights being bought by industry and municipal entities
- Not always a one-to-one relationship with respect to water rights for different uses
- Duke Energy water was not available at the plant site which is why they were buying the rights all over
- I think Mimbres Basin has the right to the Gila 18,000 acre feet of water in this basin – all we have to do is transfer it over the continental divide and build a delivery system – is that right?
- Senator Kyle has introduced legislation to keep that water in Arizona; the NM delegation and our leaders need to insure that we keep our water
- Good comments made – we really don't know what our supply is – we know there is artesian water here but don't know how much; Mimbres aquifer is enormous

Drought:

- I don't think that we have looked at the conservation uses enough; the public in general looks at it as why should my tax money help "Joe Farmer" build a high-efficiency water system; Conventional irrigation at 2.5 acre-feet reduced to 30-inches and higher quality of onion crop, is an example I know of from Greeley, Colorado, which was brought about by solving a drought situation
- In Virginia, they are getting money for not growing tobacco; why can't we have a program that pays us not to grow crops when there is a drought?
- I don't understand the principal of criticizing agricultural water use; if we eliminate food, what are we going to do? I saw a cloud of dust and it blacked out everything, so we are already in a drought now
- Why not a financial incentive for xeriscaping without a sprinkler system; Las Vegas, Nevada, has legislated that lawns cannot be in existence any more
- If drought is lack of enough water; I don't think that the Mimbres is in a drought, but maybe the Pecos is; our aquifer is so gigantic that we are not hurt by drawing down our aquifer for a few years
- Several issues related to conservation that would help in a drought; motels have toilets that are always running; sinks that are always leaking; rooms should be inspected regularly? Incentives regarding using fake turf, which isn't desert landscaping but looks like a real lawn but requires zero water; evaporative cooler is about 1/3 of water use here, so what about incentives for switching to refrigerated air; what about reporting water waste, but the lag time from reporting to taking action is so great, that very little water is saved; I live across from a school that ran all its swamp coolers with the doors locked – institutions should be part of conservation
- 90% of the time there is someone working in those schools during the summer, such as cleaning or working in the office
- Western New Mexico University is in the process of switching from swamp coolers to refrigerated air
- I don't think that it makes any difference; if we use refrigerated air we are just paying Duke Energy to generate the electricity – and that uses more water; value is good science with data that we can use to compare and evaluate
- I've heard that the minnow can live without a stream running all of the time; is that true? We'd like to have a study done about what the population really wants done about the minnow
- Put the minnows in the rain barrel
- The nation answered that question when they passed the Endangered Species Act
- Didn't we have a drought, dust bowl and all of that stuff, drought in the 50's? We didn't have to save the minnow then, and it was saved during the drought; my values around drought would be that the human beings come first
- But in the 50's there was stream flow in the Rio Grande, but today there wouldn't be stream flow if all water rights were satisfied
- 90% of ranchers are running about 1/4 of the cattle they used to run; but in the 50's we had 7 years without good rainfall; but this year beats all of those 7 years,

so it is different now; there are voluntary things going on everywhere, and I think that we are in a drought

- Conservation before a drought hits is key; if you wait too late, it will be over before you do anything; you have to do something before it's too late
- I would like to see efforts on education, rather than legislation; but we will likely have to target it at the youth; need to understand that this idea of reusing towels in a hotel room is not about saving money, but because we are all part of the community
- It's people from other places who stay in Deming's hotels, not us
- At one time there was talk about taking water from some of the nation's bigger rivers, and bringing it here

Water Administration:

- Protection of private property rights – which are our water rights
- Can't solve water problems with free market economics
- Equity would be a good word between water rights and citizen needs; policies and principles on equity should be in the State Water Plan
- I protested Duke Energy, but I was disallowed because I didn't own any water rights; citizens should have standing to protest if they are conserving water; and be at the table
- Common sense and sound science are needed; we need to crawl before we walk; go with a plan that is simple and basic, and then go on from there; we don't want to see it dictated by special interest groups; no matter who they are
- Agriculture should have a priority so that communities aren't hurt
- Back in the 70's, New Mexico was an example for water law and water administration; I came because I wondered if the purpose of the plan is to change water law to suit somebody; we shouldn't be trying to change it; we should be trying to administer it properly
- Our system is based on prior appropriation, which is a very sound basis for water law, and needs to be kept intact
- I think that the 18,000 acre-feet comes up in administration, and we should take the opportunity to show that it is water that we need and plan to use
- The Department of the Interior has to agree with our plans for using the 18,000 acre-feet
- I've never understood why New Mexico hasn't tried to keep water within the State of New Mexico; we've never had an agency work hard enough to keep water in New Mexico; I would like to see administrators take a harder look, at like the 18,000 acre-feet, and fight for it; where's the foresight to protect our water future
- Politicians are basically cowards
- I think that prior appropriation is adequate, but the stakeholders who own water have made it politically impossible for the State Engineer to make a priority call; and the Interstate Stream Commission has been deficient in managing regional studies

- Will State Water Plan change anything; will it reallocate water rights?
- More drought would create more courage to do the right thing, because planning won't produce another drop of water
- Water is a national problem; you see all of the water leaving the Mississippi; so we should realize that we need a canal system to serve the growing population in the West; too bad we didn't get the rights-of-way when we built the interstates; I can see it taking 50 years to complete the infrastructure investment, but it is important to start

Funding:

- Take welfare money and put it into conservation projects
- The welfare thing isn't quite as ridiculous as it sounds; because if you are incentivizing people coming into a drought area; you need to tax those moving in to pay for their costs of coming here; perhaps a tax on transients to compensate for their water demand
- In our community, everyone votes; but the landowners pay for it; need to make sure that agricultural community doesn't pay for the entire burden
- But the city buys water rights; so those who live in the cities should pay for them; only those who live in the county with domestic wells don't pay
- I agree that we should take the money from welfare – from agricultural welfare such as the \$80 million in the Farm Bill, and for corporate subsidies as well;
- Raise the cost of the permit to get a domestic well, and then use the revenue for some of the water programs where funding is needed
- Annual renewable tax or user fee for domestic wells
- I used to live on a farm, but now I am retired and now I have only a domestic well, so make sure that it is equitable and we all pay our fair share
- We also need to have water rights that are purchased for the minnow; the federal government needs to pay for the cost of water for the minnow
- If you put the minnows in the water barrels, it will take care of the mosquito problem as well
- Our legislature funds many projects and it is our influence that lets them know our feelings, so that our ideas get funded; how many people who are interested in these issues appear before the Finance Committee and the Interim Committee or other forums where the funding of these ideas is discussed?
- The ad hoc committee is very interested in private property rights; holding onto rights for rural communities and protecting them and their economies; they are fighting for us
- There are some gaps in our supply in the aquifer; we need funding for that; we can conserve using a drip system in agriculture, and if there was help for farmers, I am sure that they would conserve
- County water budgets are a pretty big project, that needs long-term funding; the regional planning groups cannot fund these
- I think we should do watershed or aquifer planning, but not break funding up into little pieces

- I know that it is difficult because county borders don't match watershed budgets
- Funding should go for new sources of water
- What about funding for physical treatment of watersheds, not just planning, but for real on the ground activities, so that we see action
- Gray water systems individually or for the city, would save a lot of fresh water

Other Comments/Questions:

- Need the regional plans completed to implement the state water plan policy
- Interstate Stream Commission is not doing a good job of overseeing the RWP and should be doing better

Question: State Water Plan document will have policy framework and work plan – how are regional studies going to be integrated with the 8 weeks of state plan meetings?

Answer: ad hoc committee of representatives of regions, appointed by the Interstate Stream Commission is working on that

Question: They have already identified what only the state can do and only the region can do and will be working on the overlap so everyone is in the same boat; when will the report be available?

Answer: Will be available in September