



**Comments From New Mexico State Water Plan Public Meeting
Las Cruces
New Mexico Ranch and Heritage Museum, 4100 Dripping Springs Road
Wednesday, July 23, 2003**

Following is a summary of the questions, comments, and issues raised during the discussion that followed the formal presentation on the purpose and objectives of the facilitated listening sessions for the 2003 State Water Plan. This meeting, located in Las Cruces took place in the theatre of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum. This was the 7th of 29 scheduled public meetings seeking input on the State Water Plan.

Introduction:

Rhea Graham, Planning and Communications Director of the Interstate Stream Commission, and Commissioner Buford Harris of Mesilla welcomed more than 150 people of Las Cruces and surrounding areas. She said the Interstate Stream Commission wants to hear from residents and to hear what their values are and what they consider important. New Mexico is growing and needs to plan, and needs ideas on how to administer water and arrange funding for projects.

Rhea presented an overview of the State Water Plan 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 ISC 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:

Facilitator: *If you were a manager of your own water or a steward of your own water how would you ensure a sustainable water supply for the future? What are your values?*

- Get rid of 75% of the population
- We need to cut down the incidence of green grass for decoration; if you are not grazing, then don't raise it; we should substitute desert landscaping
- Public places like schools should not be watering like they were at 10:00 AM; it's all evaporating before it hits the ground
- We should go back to the push broom instead of hoses for cleaning.
- Municipalities have got to make plans for planned growth as opposed to sprawl
- Only 10% of the water is used by municipalities so if we removed the municipalities then the water use would not change and the problem would not be solved.
- The adjudication process needs to be completed; the SEO has been dragging their feet on this for years, we also need to renegotiate the Rio Grande Compact, if we don't do this then we'll continue to lose water...it's the most expensive form of water use.
- Being honest about all these issues is the most critical value.
- One of my issues is my concern about water law, beneficial use, use it or lose it; this type of law is contradictory to conserving water
- No hierarchy of benefit, the water you pour on the grass has the same value as the water you drink, or the water your cow uses
- If it's conservation you use, then we need to define conservation as doing more with less
- Do any people have any idea how much water it takes to water a golf course - 15 million gallons a year
- We need to look at new technologies for water to expand our water resources, like desalination; also we need to reward people for using drip irrigation rather than flood irrigation; also we need to ask ourselves how we value agriculture as a state – if we don't, then we have to buy agricultural water
- I deal with policy issues and things at the University; some historical data shows that it's not agriculture and municipalities that are using the water, it's the current density of forests in the upper watersheds is dense; if we can go through and thin our forests then we will

have more water and we will not have to change any policies or laws; trees are huge consumers and we must have a policy of thinning

- It's been shown that evaporation in Elephant Butte and Caballo is great...another consideration is in Canada they have lots of fresh water going to waste, we need to look at how to get the water from Canada to here and just be creative about looking for other sources
- Plan for all resource users and managers to come to the table and consider wildlife, instream flows, Bosques and all values around water, when planning for the future
- Pecos River Compact needs to be renegotiated; have El Paso deal with their own issues; salt cedar is a big water user, the federal government introduced it and they need to help us get rid of it
- We need to educate our youth, also I worked in landscaping this summer, and we need to outlaw all non- indigenous species to New Mexico
- There is a proposal to extract gas and oil from Otero Mesa, couldn't this water be used for populous areas in El Paso or Juarez? Also, I don't understand why there isn't a continental picture of water use
- A comment was made about water being sold from agriculture to municipal use, but Colorado also made some serious mistakes in that they limited transfers from one region to another, and those regions have been destroyed because of the lack of water
- When you are talking about stewardship values, we are talking about equity; why would we do it in one part of the state and not in others? Where are we going to place the burden? There cannot be stewardship unless it is fair and equitable

Balancing Supply and Demand:

Facilitator: *We want to consider that demand is greater than supply and what would be the values that guide these decisions?*

- Underlying a lot of these values is the underlying value of putting into place; market mechanisms for water
- One of the ways to value supply and demand is by the rate schedules we impose and most of New Mexico has rates that penalize you for more use and that is not the whole story...I work with Colonias and sometimes a 2 dollar part could save you money; balancing supply and demand needs to have serious education behind it and having benefits and consequences for behavior
- We are on a basin - it's a big bathtub underground and we can just keep pumping and it is cheap for us...so what is the incentive to stop from pumping so that we are saving for the future, i.e. desalination for the future?

- People that are on wells...is there an average amount that can be used? Staff answered that there are some numbers, about 60 gallons per person per day, but to come up with an average is difficult, but the average used by an individual is 60 gallons...
- Again, it's education...I don't see conflicting needs, making people aware of how we can share; and we shouldn't fear a fish
- The State should embark on computer models and develop various scenarios and look at some portion of the environment for instream flow, for supply and demand impacts, etc.; I would encourage the state to embark on basin-wide computer models
- The State should take steps to quantify scientifically what water we do have
- The Office of the State Engineer needs additional resources to maintain a database and get additional meters put in, the Office of the State Engineer has never had enough resources to do this; having science about what is going on is fine, but we need to monitor what is going on continuously in order to make good decisions
- We should ask the State Engineer to get a long-term treatment plant for surface water
- We don't have a shortage of water – we have a shortage of cheap good water, we need to develop technologies and we are going to have to pay for that water; Some in Las Cruces say that the cost of service to hook up doesn't cost rural customers...but new users should pay for the use of that water and the infrastructure for the expanded use
- One of the bad raps farmers are taking is that we don't have very accurate measurement of the water we are taking, but whenever we have meters on our wells, we actually use less water than what we are said to be using; For one thing, on new wells the State Engineer requires us to have a meter, so the farmers that have the meters can tell us what they are actually using...in most cases you don't use as much water as the irrigators say you are using
- I would like to encourage the Water Rate Task Force to continue the work they are doing...that's the rate improvement task force; new users need to pay for all the costs surrounding that new use
- Be cognizant of what price does – price needs to be a part of the equation
- I believe that we need to be aware of the dam that was built, and who it was built for; I know my father mortgaged his land to help put that dam in, and so there needs to be some just compensation
- Water was more expensive in Detroit in 1969, than it is here now
- I actually live in California, so this is very interesting...we are paying higher for water now in California, and if you have the opportunity to take care of the water problems now, then do it for future generations
- No one has talked about increasing supply, but no one has talked about the excess water that could be re-injected into the basin during good years...why can't we take the effluent from Las Cruces and send it down the river?

Drought:

Facilitator: *Given what we know about drought and the fact that we will see more drought, what would you do to deal with the problem of drought?*

- One of the things we can do is cut down on the green grass on the lawns and the golf courses, that is a tremendous waste of water
- In Norfolk, Virginia, use was based on a percentage, and we had to reduce our household consumption by 25%...there is a need for enforcement and I know that we don't enforce a lot of our laws in Las Cruces, but enforcement might work
- Again, we observe cost increases with other commodities when there are shortages, and so water needs to reflect variability into our supply conditions
- Living in Arizona, the education process made sure that the children understood that turning the faucet off when brushing your teeth is a good thing, and there should be a moratorium on new building
- The hydro -- illogic cycle goes from rainfall to drought to panic; Don't forget about reality when it's wet
- Remember that pricing doesn't affect the wealthy, so because water is a basic need, we must protect the poor; we must educate everyone about usage and conserving water
- Drought planning needs to be more of an institutionalized process; we need to see how we can use drought planning as a tool; don't ignore this when drought goes away
- I am concerned that if we use drought pricing to restrict water usage, we are only looking at the short term...it's a management issue, we need to use economic benefits of different uses to help us decide how to bring supply and demand into balance
- I would like to respond to that by asking, what are we going to drink...money?
- Our circumstances vary greatly across the state, we need to apply decisions locally so that it is an equitable situation, I know that our surface water allocation is minimal, but what we need to realize is that when the farmers sell, they will be selling their water rights to the cities, but what are they going to grow? What we need to really grow, is support for desalination

Water Administration:

- I haven't heard whether there is a strong preamble for this whole plan, there needs to be some strong preamble to funnel all the thoughts into it; right now what we are looking for in the Framework? Is it what we can do in the existing legal Framework?
- If we cannot get a consensus on some of these issues then we won't have as much clarity about what values to be guided by

- One of the things I wanted to mention is that all water use ought to be metered...this ought to be a goal in the next few years; so that we know what we are using
- I hear comments about lakes, golf courses etc. but they are important to our quality of life, and we should manage for this value
- We are talking about city water and farm water, in California farmers pay \$2 an acre-foot, and more is paid per acre-feet for urban water, but that is comparing very different things, and people need to understand the different costs and benefits of different usages
- This is a combination of water administration and funding – the Governor said that we need millions of dollars to finish adjudication, and the legislature did not appropriate any funds to finish the adjudication; hopefully they'll appropriate more funds to adjudicate
- Considering the needs of wildlife must be part of management decisions
- I think we're spending too much money on adjudications and we could do it less expensively...we could do it with less money and more efficiently; there are other processes and tools to get it done faster
- I hear comments about water use, but that is not actual use, some of the water goes back into the aquifer; we have to be careful of what we're talking about; we need to talk about actual numbers in our water inventory
- Regarding the use of funding for the State Engineer, there is a tremendous amount of funding resources out there from the federal government as well; we could spend more on infrastructure for our water systems; you also need to be careful about where you adjudicate....spending funds to adjudicate where water is not readily available seems to be a waste
- Spending time in court fighting doesn't produce one gallon of water; I think the problem is that it doesn't deal with real management, it deals with how the water is allocated
- Judge Valentine is back in the back and I have to disagree, we need to address the adjudications, the longest standing court case is a case in New Mexico, some courts cannot decide because...it doesn't make sense to meter if you don't know who owns the water; the problem is that we are afraid to cut people off, we don't have the guts to exercise priority administration; we're going into the Permanent Fund to get the funding so that we don't have to adjudicate...that's just wrong; we need to get the laws through to adjudicate
- My heartburn is not about "not using priority administration", but about "not having a priority of benefits"
- I would like to see a policy decision come out to finish the adjudications within this Administration
- How do we compare with other states? Colorado has adjudicated all the surface rights, most issues that arise are transfers, whereas in New Mexico about 10% have been adjudicated; we are in the lower echelon in states that have their water rights adjudicated

Funding:

- We are behind the State Engineer and Interstate Stream Commission, and we are trying to get funds, and I know they wasted a lot of money in the past and we will be working to get this thing done right this time
- A new State sales tax; add another level so it affects everyone
- During last year's legislative session, we took \$30 million to buy out farmland – one message should come clear, is that there is an economic system that would solve the problems; if the communities of Roswell, etc. had been forced to buy the farmland then they would be forced to do all the good things we know need to be done; why would they do that if there is no incentive? It's a bad, wrong-headed policy, and a bad solution; the rest of the state has bailed them out
- What about privatization of water?
- The water and stream systems are all public waters and the right to use water is your use right
- Regional water plans are critical because they are local; people of the State own the water rights, then why would we want to give it away for free? Other resources have value, double-dividend works – impose tax on polluters and high users, by charging royalties on the extraction of water and lower the income margin on tax rates
- We should have a policy around the value of water that would guide municipal water rates across the state, etc., there are very different values to different usages

Other Comments and Questions:

Q: Another question about residential wells that are metered; what is the penalty?

A: We haven't had that problem yet, the enforcement actions can be fines.

Q: What is the process for the State Water Plan? What are we going to come away with? Are you starting from scratch or are you taking all the work that's been done before and including it in the plan?

A: Work by regional committees will be integrated and the state is helping them get completed. State is not just starting from scratch with this plan.

Q: The State's gone through the planning process including the drought planning process; create a plan that is not put on the shelf, because they don't have the structure to revisit the plan and monitor it; what mechanism does the Governor have for making sure that the plan does not sit on the shelf? – There should be a mechanism for active monitoring and evaluation, and these tasks must be funded

A: The State Water Plan will be the plan for how we strategically allocate resources for the agency

- All the comments have been about the quantity of water...we need to focus on water quality too, because it is critical
- Recharge of water should be put back into the aquifer
- A little bit of water adds up, if you just cut down the flow in different facilities, I wish we could do something about facilities put into hotels and motels; we don't need the on-off kind of facilities