



**Comments from New Mexico State Water Plan Public Meeting:
Tucumcari
Convention Center Annex
Thursday, August 7, 2003**

Following is a summary of the questions, comments, and issues raised during the facilitated listening sessions for the 2003 State Water Plan, at the public meeting in Tucumcari, New Mexico. This was the 14th of 29 scheduled public meetings on the State Water Plan.

Introduction:

Planning and Communications Director Rhea Graham of the Interstate Stream Commission welcomed approximately 35 people who attended the meeting from Tucumcari and the surrounding areas. She said the Interstate Stream Commission wants to hear from residents regarding their values around the management and stewardship of water. 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 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

Stewardship:

- Keep New Mexico water in New Mexico
- Retain the integrity of the existing irrigation districts
- I am deeply concerned about people who want to make changes to the State Water law with the intention of solving the states water problems
- Curb the growth of subdivisions and bluegrass lifestyles
- The Bosque in its current form is causing depletions in the water supply; big cities like Albuquerque need to understand this and do something about it
- We're supposed to give our ideas about the plan, but all we have is what they report in the newspaper; reporting is inconsistent from story to story, and incomplete from what we are hearing tonight – I called the New Mexico American Water Company and talked to one lady, then another lady who contradicted the first lady; what we need are real facts; each of these newspaper stories has conflicting facts; and everybody said their figures were obtained from the Office of the State Engineer
- Stewardship is that the federal government doesn't have any right to meddle with my water right, which is a property right
- I wonder about spreading out the population; if you spread the population out a little bit, you also spread out the economic benefit
- I'd like to see some business in Tucumcari; we're forgotten politically and economically, and they are almost going to forget our water – bring some industry here to put people to work
- What water means to me is life
- Shouldn't corporations be forced to use their water efficiently? I understand they waste a lot of their water
- We don't have the resources to make our water use more efficient
- We have already briefed by Estevan Lopez and the State Engineer regarding our water situation here; we would be giving up 10,000 acre-feet of saved water to the Pecos; we would get debt forgiveness from the federal government in return (we're getting \$200 per acre foot—number is not accurate), and title transfer to the pipeline project; they want to line the entire Conchas Canal
- We're getting \$62 million for a pipeline that will cost \$60 million; we're not giving up our rights; we're giving up our saved water
- There is strong opposition to hooking the Canadian to the Pecos, because we can be stewards on the Canadian and they can be stewards on the Pecos
- The way we have done things in the past doesn't work; the reason we are having these meetings is because we need a new paradigm – we recognize New Mexico is in dire straights, and that we need to focus outside the box; we need to raise consciousness across the state, and we need other avenues for improvement

- The water that is purchased in Ft. Sumner is water that was lost; they aren't giving up anything by sending it down the ditch; whatever water is sent to the Pecos is water that would have gone down the ditch
- In my opinion this project [Conchas Canal] should not be done; it will not solve the New Mexico's water problems –the only thing it is going to solve is putting lawyers to work; it's an example of a project that should not end up in the State Water Plan
- We need to control non-native species
- It costs money to be a steward of water; if the state can come up with a way to compensate people through tax, credits or other mechanisms they should
- How are they going to prioritize this? What is the top of the line for water use? I don't think it needs to be endangered species; I think people should be the priority, and economy--which falls into a broad category--comes second
- To me water is about what controls the land; if you want people to control the land, then they need water; if you want the miners to control the land, then give the water to the miners
- Stewardship should be governed by the fact that agriculture is the only essential business, and in New Mexico agriculture cannot exist without water

Supply and Demand:

- Urban areas need to start water harvesting and storage
- We need incentives to conserve the water supply; you still have to prioritize these uses however
- We need to do a better job of educating people on wasted water; water shouldn't automatically be served in a restaurant if you don't ask for it
- Who is going to live and who is going to die? That is going to be decided by the expense of water in the future
- I can be against one project and for another, we need the Eastern New Mexico pipeline to keep the population we have, here
- We have to believe that cities do not have to grow; they can grow up, but they don't have to sprawl
- What do you do to stop the city from growing? Use the legislature; raise the price of water
- Educate people on the cost of water; I think we have started this and people are noticing, and we didn't do it until three years ago
- Water loss is the biggest loss in New Mexico.
- We mostly have water loss because of impaired watersheds and inefficient supply lines
- Green technology should be aimed toward using gray water, to flush a commode, run washing machines, etc.
- The State Water Plan needs to recognize that the allocation of water shouldn't be decided only in monetary terms; it has different values, some higher, some lower, depending on use

- Supply and demand needs to be decided on a regional basis
- How much involvement do we have with this plan? This is a state-funded plan; the only impact would be if we were to receive Federal funds for part of the plan; but as far as who owns this plan, it is owned by New Mexico
- Most of the employees think we work for them and they work for us. The Office of the State Engineer works for us, not the other way around
- Maybe we need to look at the Endangered Species Act—how much right does a minnow have in times of drought? How much control does the federal government have on our water?
- We need to revisit the compacts; Texas wants our water and we need to supply it; The engineer who did the study in 1947 missed it, and we lost the whole thing; there has still got to be something done, and if they demand it and we can't supply it, what are we going to do?
- The engineer should follow the state law instead of buying out farmland in the Pecos, and buying our water to meet its obligations to Texas; also, buying farms is not going to solve the problem; we need more global solutions
- Who has the money is who has the water; we don't agree with that, but we sure don't want that to happen; but the state has an uncanny way of getting what they want without just compensation; you can't put a \$\$ figure on the culture and customs of this state

Drought:

- We better start enforcing state law by enforcing priorities; sooner or later they are going to have to enforce the law...in times of shortage that's actually when it applies; it's better to harm a few people rather than harming a lot; I think we need to make sure there is water in hospitals, schools etc.; we need to make sure that they get their supply
- We need to have a drought management plan; the irrigation districts were able to survive in times of drought, but were really challenged; there are too many people and too much federal involvement; manage the people
- Manage the salt cedar...keep the cottonwoods, they use as much water but are pretty
- Encourage xeriscaping, gray water and good conservation
- Everything starts at home; don't buy water for your swamp cooler, and then you drive up and down and you see everything getting watered; so who's telling who that it starts at home?
- You may allow---that the State Engineer has the right to shut down some non-essential uses of water
- The State Engineer should analyze the municipal and industrial uses of the state
- Whoever is in charge needs to implement drought solutions before we get in the drought; we need to do all the infrastructure work before we get into the drought
- Along the same lines we need to implement newer technologies; there may be a way to control evaporation perhaps by joining other states to explore water losses

- You might want to look at the aquifers too – protect the aquifers
- You manage the drought all of the time, because right now all you have to do is shut down the farmers and grow the cities; but when the farms are gone, who are you going to turn to?
- The way we operate now is by the time we are in a drought it's too late
- Put on the Economic Department's website that we live in a desert, and that we don't have any water

Water Administration:

- You have regions; you don't have one King in the state – the needs of one region aren't the same as the needs in another part of the State
- Without adjudication, you can't know how to administer water rights; 20 years ago we were told that it would take 20 years to complete all adjudications, and we are being told today that it is still 20 years to complete adjudications
- Enforcement, and who is going to pay for it?
- New Mexico state law does not permit setting priorities between competing uses; and I prefer that it be kept that way, because once you start tampering with it, things will get worse
- If we are going to manage the water, we have to pay to manage the water
- Not a bigger budget; just use the tax money we already are paying
- We need a bigger budget for water planning in the state
- Regions should look at their aquifers and see which ones are willing to sell their water through water pipelines; we pipe other resources in pipelines, and we may have to do that with water at certain times to meet the needs of the population; this has got to be bigger than a state issue – it is a multi-state issue in the western states
- There is a lot of reluctance to establish a price for water; but if we are going to manage something, we need to have an economic value placed on it; you can make decisions based on the value of the water
- Should we require that water prices be public knowledge? Cattle prices are on the radio, so perhaps the transaction price of water rights should be public information too?
- Water and water rights are a piece of property, and that is a matter strictly between a seller and a buyer; no one has a right to tell you what price to sell your land for; the owner has the right to set the price
- Use technologies that make use of our available salty water, and find a way to take care of the salt
- One other management tactics to look at that goes into funding later on; users who use in excess of what they should, should pay substantially more for what they pay for now.

- Measure water; in streams, out of streams, water meters, weirs; measure it so that you can manage it
- Know how much you have

Funding:

- The user should pay for the water that they use
- The minnows don't have any money and should not be able to use the water
- If you use desalinated water, you should pay for it as the user
- The cities should be able to pay to put in more efficient irrigation systems; I have a horse, so I'm a user of alfalfa, so am I a user of that water that grew the alfalfa? If the city buys a farm, it destroys that lifestyle; but if the city pays for farm irrigation improvements, they should be able to use that water
- Is there anything that shouldn't pay for water, such as the silvery minnow?
- All people in New Mexico pay for what water they use; but there is some misuse of water
- Willing buyer and the willing seller sets pay scale
- If the user is going to pay; the city already pays a share of our irrigation project; you can't sell something that you are basically getting for nothing in the first place; funding would almost have to be treated like a school district – I haven't got any more children in school, but I still pay taxes for schools to educate those children that are still in school; the biggest mistake is turning it over to private entities
- We shouldn't let a private water company get a hold of our water
- If water rights are a private property under a permit, then until that changes it has got to stay private; if cities buy water such as San Juan Chama storage water, let them pay for it as the user
- I think we need better prioritization at the federal and state level for their funding decisions; we see millions of dollars going into Albuquerque, when we are dealing with basic infrastructure needs
- If we look at going to "user pays", there should be various and different fees for type of user; agricultural users need a lower rate than city users
- Try to utilize the water where it's at instead of trying to take it somewhere else; this would reduce the funding needed to utilize the water and would lower the expense; this would create less of a funding problem
- Income from the lottery should be used for water as well as education

Other Topics and Questions:

Question: Then is the water owned by the state?

Answer: Yes. In our Constitution it states that the water is owned by all of the people.

- I fear this Act that creates a state water plan, will cause the agriculturalist to be outvoted when this becomes a political decision; in a drought, it won't take much to get decisions made, that get rid of agriculture
- We need to keep the existing water laws; as long as they aren't tampered with, then we can protect ourselves against Texas and other threats; if the existing law is changed, then we have something to fear
- You are taking comments, and we have basically given you theory about how we think; will we have more meetings about what happens? Right now they might think that we are all happy, and don't have any concerns about what is written down; it all depends on how you use our information
- Is all of the state in undeclared underground basins? The last we heard is that they held hearings in our area, but we never heard the outcome
- The biggest fear that I have is about the timeline; therefore, if it takes longer to get it right, they need to take the time to get there
- Every Office of the State Engineer employee that I have met is always very helpful and understanding; and we should put our trust in the State Engineer who is working on our behalf; and I think that some thanks should be in order
- Continue to consider the custom and culture of the State of New Mexico