



2009 State Water Plan Update Public Outreach

Region: Tularosa/Salt Basins

Alamogordo Civic Center

Alamogordo, NM

April 27, 2009

Summary of Discussion

Facilitator/Recorder: Bruce Poster

Welcome and Introductions

Gretel Follingstad, State Water Planner with the Interstate Stream Commission, welcomed the group of about 35 to this public forum sponsored jointly by the Office of the State Engineer and the Interstate Stream Commission (OSE/ISC). She introduced agency staff and contractors:

Maureen Haney, Communications Specialist

Andrea Mendoza, Office of the State Engineer, Las Cruces

Christine Chavez, Office of the State Engineer, Las Cruces

Juan Hernandez, Office of the State Engineer, Roswell

Andy Morley, Office of the State Engineer, Roswell

Presentation

Follingstad presented an overview of the New Mexico's state and regional water planning process to date, including data on population, water supply and demands, and an overview of the Tularosa/Salt Basin's Regional Water Plan

Questions and Comments on Presentation

Bruce Poster, contracted facilitator, took questions and comments from the audience on the presentation and other related water issues.

Comment: We need to employ watershed management practices above the Bonito Pipeline.

Question: Did the Regional Water Plan (RWP) include growth in military bases?

Answer: The RWP data is from 2002, which was projected from the 2000 US Census report. This data was compared to the 2008 BBER population report. Both data sources should have accounted for military base population.

Responses to the Four Focus Questions

The group considered the four focus questions for public input on the State Water Plan Update.

1. What should your region and the state as a whole do to assure water for a growing population?

- Population growth rates are disturbing. We need to use economic gardening to find jobs for existing residents rather than attract new residents—use existing resources and revitalize our communities--be sustainable.
- Thinning trees to improve watersheds and create healthier environments—is there congressional support for this?
- Stop mining groundwater by moderating use to reduce the current rate of drawdown. Answer: The Office of the State Engineer wants local input on the drawdown problem to update the administrative criteria for the Tularosa Basin.
- Otero County has set a goal reducing drawdown to 1 foot per year from 2.5 feet per year.
- Get additional water rights as was done north and west of Tularosa.
- The Bureau of Geology is doing hydrological studies in the Sacramento Mountains- using test wells to determine groundwater is not as old as was thought. Answer: Office of the State Engineer does worst case projections of use, so there could be more water available than per the projections. The Office of the State Engineer manages basins for a 40-year time period.
- Nothing can be done to fully “assure” that the water is available. We can’t control Mother Nature.
- Thinning and brush control lead to more spring flow; but the Endangered Species Act interferes with the Forest Service being able to do thinning; people should come first, not critters. The Apache Tribe has done a good job of thinning, which has led to greater stream flow.
- There should be more hydrologic modeling to best determine water availability.
- Strengthen county ordinances to require that developers provide water for their subdivisions.
- Improve and support well monitoring and tracking of data to see how growth is impacting levels.
- Municipalities need to update water availability studies before annexing new lands to be developed, including recreational developments.
- Need to have all new wells metered
- Support metering of existing wells
- Consider how El Paso growth is impacting groundwater in New Mexico (2); there is drawdown due to the El Pase desalination plant.

- There are currently 600 meters on 6,000 lots in Timburon; there is no way the system could meet the demand if all lots were developed; that should be the responsibility of the developer.
- We need better watershed management on federal lands
- Need for adjudication to assure senior and junior water rights holders are treated fairly in a priority call.
- Involve the federal government in dealing with Texas water usage and reconciling the differing state legal systems; Interstate Groundwater Commission.

2. ***What water conservation strategies would help meet increased constraints (population growth, climate variability) on water in your region and the state as a whole?***

- Infrastructure improvements needed to stop leaking and promote efficiency in the distribution system.
- Capture water in rain barrels.
- Watershed management needs to be a priority; 10,000 acres of mesquite uses more water than all of Alamogordo. Eradicate invasive species.
- Wetland restoration for flood control, to promote infiltration and improve micro climates
- Alamogordo uses tiered rates and xeriscaping to reduce demand and provides rebates for low-flow toilets, resulting in very low per capita usage.
- Agricultural conservation needs to be a priority; e.g. via state incentives for rebate programs for more efficient irrigation systems.
- Waste water re-use; effluent for municipal irrigation.
- We need state legislation for gray water re-use on lawns.

3. ***Have you observed climate variability (e.g. drought, flooding, severe storms) in your region? What should be done to prepare for these extreme circumstances in your region and the state as a whole?***

- We have had less snowpack in the winter and more summer rain in the past several years.
- More insects are observed during winter; other vegetation and wildlife are changing due to higher temperatures.
- Better data on water uses; Monitoring systems in place to record impacts of drought
- We need a statewide groundwater database with more data provided by the public. Answer: The state is interested in improving their database.
- The state should establish criteria for community well monitoring to distinguish between municipal, agricultural and 'golf-course' water uses

- Water storage solutions; lakes and water tanks to capture high flows.
- Flood irrigation can be beneficial for aquifer recharge.
- Local agriculture needs to remain a priority (2)
- Food security and water security go hand in hand
- Agricultural keeps the ground cool and moist and provides food security.
- Our mountains store water over a long cycle.

4. *What water projects are needed in your region? How should these projects be prioritized for funding?*

- Build retention ponds to capture water and reduce flooding.
- Take action to stop flooding (and waste of water) around the County Courthouse.
- Alamogordo has relined and covered reservoirs to reduce losses.
- Invasive species eradication projects: e.g. salt cedar.
- Dry soils lead to flooding; canyons should be allowed to restore their moisture levels and store water in alluvial basins.
- We need \$240,000 to clean out the existing reservoir for Tularosa, which will improve efficiency of water use for agriculture.
- We are exploring the feasibility of a \$14.2 million dam and hydro system for Tularosa.
- The Apache Tribe has used a gradual approach to reducing erosion via watershed management; this is needed on the east and west slopes of the mountain.
- State of New Mexico needs to establish statewide building codes that allow for gray water usage. (The mineral content is even beneficial to plants.)
- We have seen that a Holloman AFB/Lincoln National Forest watershed project addressed flood control, increasing grass cover on banks and can also help the Mexican Spotted Owl (It's a win/win).
- Improve stream systems with salt cedar and elm tree removal projects.

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