



2009 State Water Plan Update Public Outreach

Region: Lower Rio Grande
New Mexico Farm & Ranch Auditorium
Las Cruces, NM
April 14, 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 30 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:

Rolf Schmidt-Peterson, Rio Grande Basin Manager
Martha Franks, Legal Counsel (contracted)
Karin Stangl, Planning and Communications Director
Maureen Haney, Communications Specialist
Angela Bordegaray, State Water Planner
Kim Abeyta-Martinez, ISC Financial Manager
Erek Fuchs, District IV Staff
Christine Chavez, District IV Staff
Andrea Mendoza, District IV Staff
Jon Verploegh, District IV Adjudication Staff

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 Lower Rio Grande 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.

Presentation data:

Question: Participants asked the presenter to explain water use percentages.

Answer: OSE/ISC staff explained techniques on agricultural conservation have been explored by New Mexico State University (NMSU) experts, including laser leveling of fields

for efficient water distribution. However, the issue of agricultural conservation leading to less return flow does need to be addressed.

Future water supply and growth:

Question: Participants asked questions regarding water for growth. Concerns around where the water will come from to meet projected demands due to growth. Participants were particularly concerned with agricultural fields being replaced by 'ranchette' developments.

Answer: It was noted that developers should be required to bring their own water rights to projects.

Current water supply:

Question: Participants questioned the longevity of the current supply. They were concerned about having water for future generations.

Answer: Dr. Phil King, of NMSU, noted we need more critical drought measures, requiring priority calls and good planning for effective conjunctive management.

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?

- Question: Should we try to supply existing residents or newcomers first? Answer: People will come to New Mexico, so we need to find a way to meet their needs.
- Question: Should new development have guidelines for water catchment or recovery, e.g. during the monsoons?
- Answer: Yes, but it is hard to capture that water.
- Answer: There is high flow intensity in summer, making it hard to deal with both flood control and droughts.
- Hydrologic conditions vary by region. The state should provide funding and expertise to help each region improve their plans.
- The regional water plans should be assembled into the state water plan.
- There are also large variations within regions that need to be considered.
- Big developers are driving up water prices; privatization of water should be regulated. Address population issues across state lines.

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?

- The City of Las Cruces has a water conservation program that includes outreach and training, e.g. tree planting, proper landscaping, improving soil to retain moisture, higher rates for large users.
- Complete adjudication would help to open up water markets.

- NMSU is doing a lot of conservation work.
- Hold water fairs, to educate the public and youth.
- The Clean Water Act and New Mexico Environment Department make it difficult to capture water and clean up e-coli.
- The Clean Water Act does not need to be seen as an obstacle. Water quality is very important.
- In Florida, water is reused and reclaimed, e.g. for golf courses and lawn watering. New Mexico needs a water re-use initiative.
- Las Cruces is already working on reuse, e.g. on the West Mesa and for parks and golf courses.
- Increase irrigation delivery efficiency.
- Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) meters all water going into and out of the system.
- EBID is treating surface water and using some of it for drip irrigation.
- According to studies at NMSU, flood irrigation can be as efficient as drip irrigation when using techniques such as laser leveling fields.

2. 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?

- I have observed less rain since I moved here 11 years ago.
- It was dry in 1994-2005, but monsoons have been better the last few years.
- With or without climate variability, we need to be good stewards of our water.
- EBID flood control dams are important during the monsoons, and occur during the irrigation season.
- EBID now predicts the intensity of floods and alerts communities to potential threats. There are emergency plans for each dam.
- The State Engineer should use existing authority over domestic wells and try to strengthen the law.
- Some levies are being decertified, which could impact insurance rates.
- Harvest rainwater and runoff as part of an integrated approach with ground water management.
- Use permeable concrete to reduce runoff and increase recharge.
- There are some problems with permeable concrete. See New Mexico Department of Transportation research on this subject.
- Address the energy/water nexus to reduce carbon loading; focusing on both long-term and short-term problems and solutions.
- Solutions should be locally specific. There are different conditions for different regions.

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

- There is a need for a surface water treatment plant. There was also discussion of the ability to use surface water for non-agricultural users via special water users associations per the 2004 law, which still needs implementing regulations.
- Rainwater and runoff catchment program.
- Need sewage treatment systems to reduce septic tanks and contamination of groundwater.
- Watershed management is needed to reduce runoff and erosion, e.g. planting grasslands and bank stabilization. Watershed restoration and consistent management is vital.
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the military, the US Forest Service, and the state all need to be involved in watershed management.
- Vegetation can be used to increase infiltration of storm water runoff and address some water quality issues.
- Study non-point source pollution management solutions used elsewhere and address the energy/water nexus.
- Projects that increase the capacity of our water could impact water quality.
- Desalination research and potential projects.
- Las Cruces already has plans for desalination. NMSU is studying the use of brackish water.
- EBID is regulating storm water runoff by using small reservoirs near the Rio Grande in conjunction with the City of Las Cruces, the Bureau of Reclamation, and developers.
- EBID is working on the first of a series of low head hydro-electric dam projects (10kW) that will generate a small source of energy and some revenue.
- The Bureau of Reclamation now allows water to be carried over for one year, creating conservation opportunities.
- The State Engineer should fully declare the basin before additional applications can be filed.

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