2009 State Water Plan Update Public Outreach

Region: Mora/San Miguel/Guadalupe

Highlands University, Leveo Sanchez Lecture Hall
Las Vegas, New Mexico
May 12, 2009

Summary of Discussion

Facilitator/Recorder: Rosemary Romero

Welcome and Introductions

Angela Bordegaray, State Water Planner with the Interstate Stream Commission, welcomed the group of about 45 to this public forum sponsored jointly by the Interstate Stream Commission and the Office of the State Engineer (OSE/ISC). She introduced agency staff and contractors:

Julie Maas, Communications Specialist
Linda Gordan, OSE District VI Manager (Santa Fe)
Jerri Trujillo, Upper Pecos Basin Manager, OSE District VI (Santa Fe)
Hilario Rubio, OSE Acequia Liaison
Richard Trujillo, OSE Community Liaison
Martha Franks, OSE Legal Counsel (contracted)

Those attending the meeting came from the Las Vegas Community Water Board; the Tierra y Montes Soil and Water Conservation District; the City of Las Vegas; the New Mexico Acequia Association, including several acequias and ditches: La Aguila Ditch, Acequia de los Dolores, Association Las Canteras, La Puerta de Luna Acequia, and the Gallinas Canal Acequia Association; South San Ysidro Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Association; representatives from New Mexico's US Congressional delegation (US Senator Udall and US Representative Ben Lujan), the New Mexico Environment Department, the Department of Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources, the New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute, and other interested citizens.

Presentation:

Bordegaray presented an overview of the New Mexico's state and regional water planning process including data on population, water supply and demands, and an overview of the Mora/San Miguel/Guadalupe Regional Water Plan. The Mora/San Miguel/Guadalupe

Steering Committee oversaw the plan, with the Tierra y Montes Soil and Water Conservation District serving as its fiscal agent. The ISC accepted the plan in 2005. The plan can be viewed on the Office of the State Engineer's website at: www.ose.state.nm.us/isc_regional_plans8.html.

Questions and Comments on Presentation:

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

Request: Participants were interested in knowing how to get a copy of the regional plan.
Answer: Bordegaray stated the plan is on the OSE/ISC website (see link above). A copy of the plan is available for viewing at the ISC office in Santa Fe. Additional hard copies can be requested at the cost of reproducing the two-volume document. Romero noted that several plan copies were placed in public areas such as libraries and the Tierra y Montes Soil & Water Conservation District office, Highlands University Library, public library, the City of Las Vegas and the various county offices.

Question: Participants asked for clarification on the slide showing projected water use and population. The slide data indicates that the population will increase by 11,300 people by 2040, and that the difference between the projected future water supply and the projected future population is a gap of 40,600 acre-feet.
Answer: Staff noted that the data for these graphs came from three sources: the 2005 *Mora/San Miguel/Guadalupe Regional Water Plan* provided data for both population and water use; the Office of the State Engineer's *New Mexico Water Use by Categories 2005* report provided data for water use; and the University of New Mexico's Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) 2008 *Report on Historical and Future Population Dynamics in New Mexico Water Planning Regions* provided data for population projections.

Staff further explained that the gap was calculated blending the three sources as a means to convey that there is a projected shortage of water for expected future population in the region, which indicates the importance of planning for the future. The degree of the water supply-demand gap is variable, due to the methodology used to compare all of the state's 16 water planning regions. The full population report, *Report on Historical and Future Population Dynamics in New Mexico Water Planning Regions* is located on the OSE website at: http://www.ose.state.nm.us/PDF/Publications/TechnicalReports/BBER-WPR-Estimates-Projections-Aug2008.pdf. For water use, the Office of the State Engineer calculates statewide water uses by county and by river basin in its *New Mexico Water Use by Categories 2005* report. Reports on water uses from 1990 to 2005 are on the agency website at: http://www.ose.state.nm.us/publications_technical_reports_wateruse.html.

Comment: Las Vegas City Manager Tim Dodge asked if the impact of evapotranspiration below the region was taken into account when calculating the percentage by use (in the diagram in the slide presentation showing the different water uses.) To express his point, Dodge noted Carlsbad Irrigation District holds its water in storage in the Mora/San

Miguel/Guadalupe region, yet the water is used in the Lower Pecos Valley region and the evapotranspiration happens in the Mora/San Miguel/Guadalupe region.

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?***

    - Consumptive water use: A participant pointed out that consumptive water use (for this region) seems high given that the national average is equal to about 1 percent of growth.

    - Climate change consideration: Participants noted that climate change would have a greater impact on supply and demand than population growth.

    - Monitor wells in key places to provide better data: A participant noted in the area where he lives there was a significant drop in his well and wondered if United States Geological Survey (USGS) took this kind of information into account. He had placed a sensor on his private well to shut off when water reached a certain level and hoped that USGS could also use simple types of monitoring. He thought it was important to develop criteria for placement of monitoring equipment especially for areas that had already experienced significant drops in water tables such as his area.

    - Update resource information: One participant noted that updating hydrology, geology, and topography information for the Mora area would help the region understand its resources better for planning.

    - Protect agriculture: Acknowledge the high use (and value) of water for agricultural purposes and protect acequias and other agricultural water users from threats posed by increasing water demands.

    - Planning collaboration: Another participant noted that it would be important to link various planning efforts. Municipalities need to link land use decisions to water availability, as described by the plans. For

example, subdivisions approvals should be linked directly to sufficient water supply.

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?***

- Agricultural conservation: Given the rural nature of this region, and the significance of agriculture, develop and encourage more efficient agricultural practices, (e.g. drip irrigation).

- Integrated collaboration: Everyone should work together, especially state agencies. For example, State Forestry distributes trees for planting that are not necessarily drought-resistant or low-water-use. Agencies should share and use information about "best practices" from one another.

- Provide water-related education: Outreach to all, especially youth, and inform residents about water issues

- Infrastructure upgrades: Repairing existing infrastructure could help conserve water. The City of Las Vegas has an ongoing study.

- Consider brackish water: Using brackish water could conserve potable water.

- Evaluate large institutional water users: For example, assess the hospital, university, city, and county uses and work to increase efficiency.

- Improve water modeling: Use studies to help quantify impacts.

- Strengthen local land use regulations: Allow for greater density and less sprawl (this may be more relevant to counties' regulations).

- Improve the "use it or lose it" policy: This policy discourages conservation and needs to be changed to create more opportunities for conservation.

- Watershed restoration through tree thinning: This strategy was noted in the plan for water conservation as well as to avoid catastrophic forest

fires (which can affect water supply and water quality). New Mexico Forest Water Restoration Institute and the Tierra y Montes Soil and Water Conservation District are two prominent area resources.

- Municipal conservation incentives: The City of Las Vegas should encourage conservation through incentives for low-water-use appliances such as showerheads, toilets, washing machines and dishwashers.

- New dam: The city is studying the feasibility of building another dam on the Gallinas River to store water and generate electricity.

- Using population data: Population information needs to be better used by decision-makers, particularly to understand in-migration trends.

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?***

    - Local affect of climate change: Many believe that climate change will have a great impact on the region.

    - Share resources: Participants suggested that resources be shared when there is less water. This could be done through the use of water banking.

    - Local risk of fires: With the likelihood of more fires, people will need to be better informed about how to deal with catastrophic fires and prevention.

    - Diversify water sources: This could include the use of brackish water and lowering demands for water through more efficient uses.

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

    - Water storage projects: Prioritize projects that increase storage opportunities and create greater return.

    - Water quality: Implement water treatment projects.

- Conservation education: Provide public education about various low-water-use appliances.

- Aquifer mapping

- Water re-use projects: Apply projects such as on-site treatment and storm catchments.

- Funding: All projects mentioned are included in the regional water plan. Participants asked if it would be possible to get money for implementation since this seems to be at the crux of issues.

- Legislative assistance: Another participant pointed out that the board developed to implement the plan has struggled with getting money from the legislature and could use support.

- Stimulus funding: Another participant pointed out that the state legislature is elected, and elected officials need to hear from locals about needs and ideas about allocation of resources. While some stimulus dollars may currently be available for development of water projects, the criteria requires that these projects be "shovel ready" and may not be eligible for funding because they are either studies for potential projects or not ready for implementation.

- Coordinated efforts: Participants indicated that New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) may be able to help in a coordinated funding effort through federal Clean Water Act. The NMED website has more information. Other sources of potential funding include the New Mexico Finance Authority and the Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan (ICIP) for planning (contact the state's Department of Finance and Administration's Local Government Division).

- Local and long-term funding: The local Las Vegas Community Water Board will continue to look for implementation funding and sources of long-term funding. The board might need to consider creating reserves for long-term funding and implementation projects. An immediate need is evaluation of ground water sources and engineering projects that could help clarify the various sources of potential water.

- Funding to the area: Because of the diversity of the area, it may be challenging for any entity to act as a fiscal agent for funding. It was noted that both the New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute and Tierra y Montes have acted as fiscal agents for projects.

- Information sharing: Participants encouraged the planning team to share information with the Governor's office as soon as possible as the information may be useful for stimulus dollars and water is the most important issue for the area.