



**Comments from New Mexico State Water Plan Public Meeting:
Albuquerque
The University of New Mexico Science and Technology Center
Rotunda
Monday, August 25, 2003; 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**

Following is a summary of the questions, comments and issues raised from the facilitated State Water Plan public listening session in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This was the 21st of 29 public meetings scheduled to gather public input on the initial phase of the State Water Plan.

Introduction:

Planning and Communications Division Director Rhea Graham and Interstate Stream Commissioners Judith Espinosa and Blane Sanchez; along with State Engineer John D'Antonio, welcomed approximately 150 people who attended the public meeting from areas in and around Albuquerque. State Water Planner Tim Murrell 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, and four meetings are on 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:

- One of the things that has shocked us is that, in order to meet compact deliveries, we in the Middle Rio Grande will have to retire ½ of our agricultural lands—what can we do to keep our land in agriculture?
- Take the bull by the horns, put water meters on the houses, if they want to put a well—don't expand our municipal boundaries beyond what they can serve; new houses are being built on the farmer's territory and ranches and they want everyone to turn their lawns into desert; don't put a damper on the farmer's way of life
- I'd like to address a broader issue—as a state we need to develop a different approach to this crisis/opportunity; I am an educator and children approach water with a sense of wonder; I would advocate an educational program that advocates not only science, but invites the student to partake in an educational experience that engages them with water; I think churches, Native American populations, and spiritual groups have a role in this
- Most of my knowledge comes from TV...the silvery minnow and the golf courses are depriving our children from water; we don't hear much from the agricultural community; but if we have another developer come in; write-in some type of contingency...we are not supporting ourselves when we have to go out of state and we aren't supporting our own people
- Formulate proposals and plans with the idea that the river is a source of life not just a pipeline; we have an obligation to look at water as a source of life and sustenance
- I would like to speak to a more holistic approach to water; right now we look at water as an economic commodity, and we need to look at it as a spiritual and social holistic sustainable manner
- I would like the State Water Plan to get a better handle on what the quantities of water are—as a State we need to look to the future as to how much water we are actually using
- The plan should look at technology as a way to solve our problems; we need to build in technological efficiencies for water conservation
- Agricultural water is a part of our national security—if a little disruption of a gas line in Phoenix can increase the cost of gasoline, what does this do to the cost of food on a bigger scale? Other western states have shown that bigger is not necessarily better; more growth, more pollution; Albuquerque is hotter than Socorro and we are altering our climate
- We in Zia Pueblo have been there since 1200 AD; we wanted to come to this session so that you city people can hear what we have to say in Indian country; I wanted to come here so that you can hear what we think; the reason we always had water was that we conserved our water; we have resolutions that don't allow us to wash our cars, we can't have lawns, and livestock watering is only allowed w/surface water; I take from that...conservation; it takes individual commitment to share our water for generations to come; we should not exploit the resources that are here we should make sure that other generations have water; our average amount of rainfall is 10 to 12 inches per year; we talk about culture and we talk about religion, our forefathers had the foresight to see that we needed to pray—we prayed for rain; we survived as

poor people material-wise; there is some change in Indian country where some tribes are functioning like mainstream America

- I'm so glad that Zia Pueblo preceded me; I think we can do so much to conserve; I think that we have forgotten where we live; the last 30 years is the wettest on record; what I get concerned about, is when people are looking for more water – every community in the state should have a serious conservation program; we need the support for conservation
- We need to change the mindset so that we conserve water, not just protect water...we need to feel every drop of water

Balancing Supply and Demand:

- One of the issues that seem to be most important—I think we need to be mindful that there is an inter-relationship—supply and demand – the most basic concept is to balance supply and demand; in the water world, we need to look at the efficiencies that can be brought to the water world; in the economic world, those that use their resources most efficiently are those that get rewarded; if you look at the efficiency of how Intel uses their water, it is much more efficient than irrigating 200-300 acres of alfalfa; also—beneficial use—because New Mexico has been an agrarian economy for so long, we are now looking at a transition between traditional sectors of our economy, from agriculture to urban uses; also, as New Mexicans we put a high value on water in rural areas and the culture that flows from it
- The last time I looked you couldn't eat a computer chip; economics alone---defined how? It depends on how you define economics; we need to look at United States Geological Survey studies and the issues surrounding recharge; it's clear that value has been put on these things
- Mechanisms in place to condemn water rights and move them...this is all fluff – until this issue is dealt with; we also are not talking about fair shortage-sharing; the farmers respond immediately, but developers do not; I never hear us talking about limiting our growth; it's always about importing water to maintain an artificial growth rate
- When you look at supply and demand, it takes 3.13 acre-feet of water to grow I pay more property taxes on my irrigated land than on my grazing land; so when you look at economics of water, you look at how these are used; nobody talks about buying water for in-stream flows...supply and demand, nobody mentions family; I'll say one thing – I am willing to fight for my water; you've got to be able to sell your water for what it's worth
- It's sad that people have to be in opposition from all interests; I think if possible, what we need to do is give consideration to the rural citizens in New Mexico, who have been very conservation minded; I think we need to make some place in the plan so that the rural interests do not get pushed aside; there has got to be some place in the plan to address these interests – protect their wells—protect their acequias
- No magic solution; one thing is pitting the varied interests against each other; we are having more out-migration than in-migration; the problem is trying to find away to be smart about how we use our resources
- Finding new sources is based on mining—not using a renewable supply; we need to consider an equitable solution for all of those who use water; if we commodify water,

then possibly not everyone can use it; we need to find a place to put our water so that it doesn't evaporate—i.e. Elephant Butte

- Wealth is a relative term; one man's trash is another man's treasure; in New Mexico that's obvious, and that's why people have moved here; we need to look back at what has historically happened to find out what has attracted us all here; for instance, we need to look at the watersheds and look at removing the restrictions that keep us from thinning our watersheds; perhaps this is a good way to start?
- The fear of the agricultural people that they are going to be the only ones that are affected; this is everyone's problem...everyone in the State; this is sort of preaching to the choir; this attendance is a small population that turned out for this meeting, and look at the population in Albuquerque – this problem is everyone's problem
- In terms of thinking about supply and demand—sometimes look at unintended consequences; another might be where we built a straight highway up to Cuba instead of following the Rio Puerco, where it is now hugely head-cutting; I'd like to suggest that we integrate land use, transportation and watershed planning

Drought:

- Don't call it drought, call it normal; if you look at the tree ring graph the nomenclature is really important; for instance, if you look at the graph, the drought of the 1950's was essentially normal
- We need to look at this as normal, and that it's not going away; this is the way it's going to be, we need education
- Whether or not this is drought; there is erratic rainfall with huge variability...in New Mexico, where does most of water come from? It comes from Colorado, so again storage is the big key
- I am of the opinion that drought is experienced by people in rural areas, and in the hinterlands...in La Jara we have had a drought; there is no water coming through the ditch; in the city you guys don't have a clue; when there is a drought---the cities should suffer
- In times of drought we had to ration water in the Pueblo—we reviewed the agreement we found that communities up the river weren't sharing; so we signed a water-sharing agreement and got a water master to make sure that everyone was using the amount of water they were supposed to use; when you go up the valley, you see human consumed crops, those are the only ones we irrigate; it took the local people to come to an agreement to share the shortages
- I want to talk about water reuse...I believe this is done in some parts of Africa, water reuse is something we can look into in urban areas, and use the water many times before it is lost or used up
- I'll tell you what...I grew up in Oklahoma and Arizona and we didn't have a problem...I run a small water system in northern New Mexico, and I can tell you that the Clean Water Act is doing a number on us, and it's going to cost us a lot more; the lady is absolutely right...technology is going to have to change; it is absolutely ludicrous to put potable water all over a house when you really don't need it; sure it means two water supply systems, but the first thing you've got to do, is get water to the house; you are right it's going to be expensive; I've listened to all of the words

that have come out. The EPA is looking at how much the cost of water should go up, and they are adopting 2 ½ % of the median income as the cost we should have to pay for our water

- When looking at drought and urban use, there are a lot of different conflicts that come out—and we know that there are many political forces at work and interests, and those decisions made will have a big impact on how we use water in the future; Mayor Chavez made a quip about how Albuquerque was doing fine, and he had his bottle of water, and that speaks to the point that by and large people in the City of Albuquerque have not felt what the water crisis means – what it is – and how to address it; we face draconian measures in the future if we fail to deliver water to Texas, if the aquifer continues to be mined, severe ramifications as the result of subsidence; these things can't be dwelt with just with good intentions; has to be defined with public interest and public welfare that encompasses the future and survival of the people who are affected; we have to think long and hard about what economic growth is going to take away from our future and our children

Water Administration:

- We have separate state agencies looking at water quantity and water quality, and one thing to consider is how to think about water quality when dealing with water quantity
- Involve openness and integrity of the data, and working harder and harder to improve it all of the time; such as aquifer depletion being ignored; be careful about promoting efficiencies relative to in-house use and agriculture, and that they are interchangeable and functionally the same; has been repeated so many times that it causes concern about water administration and openness and integrity of data
- Forty years ago if you called a meeting, only two or three persons would have shown; this document is what the state is going to do; is not a federal document; what mechanisms will be developed that allow New Mexico to control its own water resources, without the conflict due to multiple state agencies dealing with water; I am a states' rights person; each group of people or institution is out to exert its power and influence to control as much resource for its own needs; there needs to be some coming together of these entities so there is an integrated way of dealing with water resources
- At the local level, we need to understand that this community was developed with a belief of unlimited water supply, so there are homeowners with a great investment built on that belief, so when we go to using a surface water supply the community will feel seasonally and cyclically how a drought feels, and planners and managers should anticipate this transition
- I think that we are talking about a State Water Plan, and I'd like to focus on the 100,000 square miles of the State, and deal with unpopular issues; and I hope that they aren't popular with everybody, because we need to get people thinking water first – if we make a decision, what is the implication on water? And then the other effects, such as jobs, agriculture; the State Plan should drive towards that; droughts are trivial in the long-term, regardless of where the tree ring data are from; we need to have at the State level gutsy administration policies to meet our interstate policies,

and we can't afford to miss them; right now there are a lot of incentives to lay back and wait on a judge, we need incentives to negotiate; do we want New Mexico to continue as the rural state that it has been, or do we want New Mexico to become an urban state? We have to make a tough decision at the state level, and we are looking for the debate and coming to some conclusion; answer the tough question

- I think that the first thing that has to happen is active administration on as close to as real time as possible, such as on an ongoing basis with the City's San Juan Chama project; cumulative impact of transfers on interstate compacts, instead of on an individual basis of each transfer; none of us want federal control of New Mexico's water, so we need to look at cumulative impacts; make wet water follow the transfer; there is double or triple dipping going on, such as with domestic wells serving homes built where you transferred off a surface right; no riparian grow-up either; that would end up with transparency of water rights transfers, which exacerbates problems in water administration
- There is a lot involved in water administration, but we have to grasp to what extent we are really willing to accept priority administration – how much do we want to cut off junior users? In the Pecos basin by not enforcing priority administration with a priority call, we are balancing economic impact avoidance, but the hard decision is whether or not we are going to apply priority administration or not? How much is the Legislature willing to provide funding for sidestepping enforcement of priority administration? More importantly, how much is the public willing to pay?
- According to state statute, acequias are political subdivisions of government, and we in the La Jara acequia would like our own region, and would like to pull away from the Middle Rio Grande region; John Shomaker did a report saying that we aren't hydrologically connected to the Albuquerque water supply; I want the Commissioners of the Interstate Stream Commission to let us pull away from you, and I tell you that it will be a peaceful divorce
- People in the middle valley have voted repeatedly in favor of saving their riparian community; surface water in our rivers and ground water in our aquifers are two parts of the same system, and when we manipulate one, it affects the other; I don't see how we can decide environmental impacts unless we face this problem explicitly; we haven't decided what we want our rivers to look like 50 to 100 years from now; concern for what makes New Mexico like where we want to live; means maintaining our riparian communities; including protecting our endangered species, and we ought to take that on explicitly – what we want this place to look like 50 years from now
- We have an unrealistic view of water in this state, in that it is easy for agricultural users to sell to urban users, and generally it goes to an underground use, and there is no way that you can call the treated sewage equal in quality to the ground water that is pumped out; drinking water uses aren't the same as for other uses

Funding:

- Take a look at what is on the books right now, acequias maintain our livelihood by picking up a shovel and using elbow grease, so let's first find out what is already out there that is working, and if it works, let's don't fix it; what we do now is based on

past history, what can we use that will work in the future without having to change a whole lot?

- I'd like to see a lot of the large-scale industrial users be taxed to the max, it's my feeling that their draining of the aquifer and polluting of the river is caused by them getting a free ride
- I'd like to suggest that we shouldn't worry about funding until we get a plan – what are we funding?
- The New Mexico Finance Authority has identified over \$3 billion worth of infrastructure needs, watershed management needs, endangered species needs – in order to protect our water there needs to be enough staffing of full-time employees for continuing adjudication, and we need to be willing wherever we live, to contact an elected official to say that to protect our water and make wise use of it, we are going to have pay for it more than we pay for a gallon of milk or orange juice
- We should leverage what activities are going on – Jemez has a study on increased water efficiency; the more we know so that we can integrate our activities, so that we can use watershed restoration activities and integrate them while keeping our individual differences—perhaps we need a motto that celebrates our differences
- No matter what, the funding comes out of our pockets, we the taxpayers; most of us pay three times more for cable than for water – which one is more valuable?
- It doesn't matter whether it is our water bill, our income tax or our property tax, and it is constant, and there is increasing demand from growth, new environmental requirements, it isn't elaborate economics to see that water cost has to go up; right now in Albuquerque we pay one or two cents a gallon; how much are we spending for gasoline, let's spend a bit more for water
- I agree with everything about the importance of water, but it is the way we use the resources of the world, so we need to rethink how we use resources, including water, we need to reduce the consumption that we are adapted to, people don't live the way we do, if you travel abroad, you can see we don't need a lot of our stuff, if we reduce what we take from the planet, we will also reduce our water use