



**Comments from New Mexico State Water Plan Public Meeting;  
Moriarty  
Civic Center, 202 Broadway  
Thursday, September 4, 2003; 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**

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The public meeting in Moriarty was the 26<sup>th</sup> of 29 public meetings scheduled to gather public input in the initial phase of the State Water Plan. The meetings were organized in order to gather the views and values of people throughout New Mexico about water, as well as information about particular issues in their communities and recommendations for matters to be included in the State Water Plan.

**Introduction:**

Planning and Communication Division Director Rhea Graham welcomed approximately 80 people who attended the public meeting from Moriarty and other surrounding communities. Graham 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 ISC 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 sources

**Stewardship:**

- My mother had a stroke this morning and can't be here, and I hope that I can adequately speak for her; I have a collection of her data for the State Engineer; it is my mother's belief that the decollement that slipped off the Sandias into the Estancia basin provided limestone pathways which allow ground water to flow into the basin; I've been to Mammoth Cave and seen this movement of water, groundwater channels can provide for irrigation water; the planned change of water use from agricultural to urban uses will require compensation to farmers of both present and future earning capacity, as this water is transferred to new uses; the rapidly changing climate can be measured; well levels are changing, and there is evidence that clays are plugging up wells; the Entramosa Water Company is managed as a stewardship of the water, and we want to pass the resource on to our children; humans have lost their ability to use intuition and telepathy; don't just reiterate things already written, but revisit and rethink all of it on a broader scale – this is for hydrologists, geologists; as I said, my mother cannot be here, but she wants us to take ourselves to places that we don't know
- I heard on television that Albuquerque is losing 4 billion gallons per year due to leaking water pipes
- A lot of that leakage is due to earth movement, which even awakened me during the night, in July
- When the news talked about these water pipe leaks, they said they couldn't afford to fix them until they broke; this is a wasteful policy
- They said that the pipes were really old – put in during the '30s and never replaced them
- I read in a newspaper article that the State Engineer stated that salt cedars used 400 gallons per day of water, each tree? Per acre? Along the river? It was in the paper; I know 80 acres that have hundreds of salt cedar, so we need a tax break to remove them; also, I think that is wrong in Sweetwater that 5 or 6 families are living off one well, and something should be done about that
- My personal opinion is that no water should be moved from this basin to Albuquerque, because that is going to limit growth out here and hurt our property values
- If we take our water to Albuquerque, my three homes are going to be worth \$.10 on the dollar when I run out of water, and Bill Richardson will be in Washington then, and couldn't care less about us

- Stewardship means taking care of water and protecting it for the future; I am concerned about forfeiture; if I don't pump a well because of drought conditions, I could be penalized; to me that leaving that water in the ground is better all around than pumping it out just because of forfeiture; beneficial use seems to be in the eye of the beholder; it is wrong
- Why would we let our unadjudicated water go someplace else? Especially since there are no lawsuits over our water
- Desalination of brackish water in our basin won't work, because of inter-well leakage; it won't work to sell water to Santa Fe or Albuquerque; I know of four wells within sight of my home that are dry; there are many wells that cannot make it in a drought situation; the water has to stay here
- Irrigation is more efficient in this valley; several years ago it sprayed up in the air; spigots are lower to the ground; we can't shut down agriculture, it's our way of life
- I am very young and have lived here for 10 years and I want to continue to live here and have a family here; but I don't know if I can if we send our water to Albuquerque for the amusement parks and golf course; we need the water here; many of us cannot afford to drill new wells, which is what we would have to do if the water is exported
- A key element is understanding the resource, how much water and what quality; in a lot of cases people just throw numbers around to prove a point; they hire a hydrologist and he says what they want
- We need to look at the whole picture; people say they have to water for their grass, or their farm, or whatever, but they need to look at all the different uses; I am not a tree hugger, but it is the same with the minnow needing water; the minnow is part of the big picture, it feeds something that feeds us

### **Balancing Supply and Demand:**

- The "use it or lose it" policy has got to change; if you don't use your allotment, then the State Engineer wants to reduce your level; that just doesn't make sense; I've got neighbors just building ponds and doing all kinds of things to just use up their water
- What are the real numbers of how much water is in this basin? How good are they? If you want growth, then you have to have good numbers
- The Estancia Basin was the first region to complete a Regional Water Plan; that document has pretty good numbers about water availability in the basin, and it shows a pretty substantial difference in withdrawals and recharge, about 30,000 acre-feet in excess of withdrawals; the regional water plan is available in several locations, including the public library, city hall and the soil and water conservation office; or you can get it electronically from the Office of the State Engineer, and it should be on the Office of the State Engineer website soon
- It is time to call on federal money, so that we can really understand all of the information about our supply
- We need to monitor agricultural and domestic wells so we have clear, reliable data; now we have data but it is hard to understand

- The water table in the valley is dropping at a rate of 3 – 15 feet per year; one well dropped 70 feet in 10 years; therefore, if it is a drought year and the water table is dropping, we need a contingency plan
- I'm new to the Estancia valley this year; my well has to be metered or there is a \$5,000 fine
- New wells have to be metered, and the user has to pay the cost, I've a well close to Vallecitos that has dropped close to 200 feet in 30 years, so inter-aquifer connection needs to be studied to know how wells are affected, especially for drought
- I understood that the metering process was for domestic wells, and that a person wasn't prohibited from drilling a well for outside or livestock use
- The people who are sharing a well are metered and are restricted to that 3 acre-feet per year, so there is some conservation
- In my association, if you go past 8,000 gallons in a month, then you are cut off
- Is it possible that the metering process will result in decreasing your allotment, if the meter shows you don't use it all?
- Senator Jennings proposed removing excess trees from federal lands, and it was opposed by the Governor's office, because it would interfere with the water plan that the Governor wanted to implement, as I was told by the legislative assistant; so, it isn't about increasing supply in a drought, but rather, it was about transferring water rights, and that makes me suspicious of this process
- There is no hierarchy of use in current law; if we want to prioritize uses, we have to change our Constitution
- All golf courses should use effluent water
- Thinning trees along the rivers would virtually eliminate our water shortages
- The Grand Canyon has a very efficient process to deal with a lack of water; look under the sink and there are red and blue pipes; the red is reclaimed and the blue is fresh; the toilets only have red pipes; fresh is on a limited use; big places like Albuquerque should be using that type of system, even if it is expensive
- I've built two recycling treatment plants on White Sands Missile Range, and they are very expensive, and that's the reason we don't use water from the sea or oceans
- In the Estancia Basin water plan we put in vegetation and terrain management; involves looking at a watershed completely to increase recharge into the ground and make it available for use; junipers use 32-35 gallons per day; implementation is expensive, but it should be part of the State Water Plan
- Who has rights to that saved water?

### **Drought:**

- The United States Department of Agriculture website lists the Estancia Basin as the place with the biggest drought problem in the United States; most of our water comes recharge of the mountains, but we are running about a 30,000 acre-feet deficit, and we have been in a severe drought for 4 to 6 years, and the National

Weather Service says that it can run for another 10 years; if that happens, then we aren't going to be here

- Our well is dry as many as five days at a time
- I was here when we had a real drought, the one in the '50's; the State of New Mexico lost ½ of its forests during that drought; the hills coming out of Sedillo were all meadows, except for a few trees in the draws; so the junipers are using all of the water; trees are killing us; junipers are eating up the surface water
- I travel the canyons every day and you ought to see all of the dead trees
- That's nature taking care of itself
- It's highly cyclical in Canada, look at British Columbia
- Why not run water in pipelines from parts of the country that flood to areas where there isn't enough water?
- It's too expensive
- Make it a project, like during the Depression, since so many people need jobs
- Los Angeles has done this for years; it's a matter of how much you are willing to pay for it
- I want to play devil's advocate – we are talking about water being piped from Indiana out here, yet we don't want water taken out of our Estancia Basin to Albuquerque; isn't that a contradiction?
- To answer that, they have too much water, and we don't have enough to give away
- One of the flaws in that philosophy is that the ecology in those areas depend on having a lot of water; for instance, Georgia just went through a five-year drought and black walnut trees were going extinct; I had a friend here who is a water rights lawyer and he moved to Florida to help them set up a system because they are using so much water
- The transfer of water rights should be the decision of the property rights' holder
- Won't that end up with everybody living in Albuquerque, because they are the only ones who can afford to buy the water?
- I am concerned about plans to export brackish water from this basin; and I hope that the State Engineer doesn't cave to political pressure to open up the basin; we worked hard on the regional plan, and our number one issue was export out of the basin; I want to be sure the regional water plan will be incorporated into the state plan
- We've got compacts that have to be honored, and the State purchases water rights from farmers to meet the obligation; I don't know why the State can't look at meeting the needs of a closed basin in the same way that they do for compacts
- If you've got enough common sense to cap an irrigation well, you shouldn't be punished; "use it or lose it" has got to be changed
- Perhaps we are looking at it the wrong way; maybe this "drought" is a return to normal weather patterns and we should get used to it

### **Water Administration:**

- We need to adjudicate all of the water so we know what we have before we start water banks and transfers
- I am concerned about “too many cooks” in the administration of water; cities, counties are authorized by the legislature to have more stringent regulations than the state; it is too confusing
- I think that every well should be metered and monitored; you shouldn’t be allowed to use more than your right, and you shouldn’t lose any of your right if you use less than your right
- We need clarity on the priority of domestic wells; it can be looked at as a social issue, and wells could share shortages, everyone using a certain percent of their right
- I have been to the legislature a number of times to help find funding for data loggers so we know exactly what water we have in the “bank”; we also need to measure the rise and fall of water in different seasons, not just in the winter; we have had an evolution of uses, but the evolution of technology hasn’t kept up
- The water quality in the wells should also be monitored;
- I think that regional water plans should play an administrative role in how a region administers its water
- I don’t think that all wells should be monitored; I’ve got five wells that produce between 0.5 and 1.5 gallons per minute using air motors, and I don’t know how you can meter them, when they are two miles from electricity
- I think that there should be some effort to look at seismological monitoring due to shifting of clay, which affects our water supply and quality, and how much water a well can produce; but only the State could do that effectively
- Think about creating an incentive system so that the “use it or lose it” concept doesn’t penalize the farmer; the farmer needs a reward for conserving, and an incentive to do so;
- I think that the State Water Plan has to look at a region and anticipate its future growth; so that there isn’t wholesale escape of that water to Albuquerque
- For example, the article in the paper mentioned that Intel’s water has a higher value due to the economic impact; if we took that approach, we probably wouldn’t have farming anywhere in this country; we need to value water in other ways than money
- There should be a way to limit growth due to the availability of the water in the region
- I don’t think that we can understand the availability of water well enough to say that we can limit growth, because new technologies may emerge that increase the supply
- We’re always going to be behind the curve on the process with our monitoring and measuring; we need to look ahead to what the cycle might be and have something come out in advance to prepare for the drought that is coming; we have to get ahead of the game, rather than behind it
- Projection is based on history
- We especially don’t want to give up our water to Texas

- I think that private well owners should get to vote on who benefits from the water we don't use or is taken away from us; we should have a say on anything concerning our rights as landowners or water rights holders
- Salt water migrating through our aquifer means that we will have to think about desalination just to continue using our existing water supply

### **Funding:**

- It's kind of odd – water is more valuable than oil and gas, but the government seems to value oil and gas more than water; you have to bid to develop oil and gas; we pay money into a fund for our schools in order to have the right to use oil and gas; yet you just pay \$5.00 for water, which is really more valuable – we've got to look at what we can do, because federal funding comes with too many strings, so maybe we need to pay into a fund to get water rights, so that we can pay for all of this
- Water is part of life – oil and gas aren't necessarily part of what we require, but they are nice; I don't know about royalties on water, but fees definitely need to go up
- If Albuquerque imports water from the Estancia Basin, they should pay a tax on that water that comes back to the Basin
- That's only if we rethink our position on export of water in our regional water plan
- Natural Resources Conservation Service is working on watershed treatment; a water trust grant is being implemented right now to improve watershed health and thin trees; the limiting factor is funds, and labor; Natural Resources Conservation Service is looking for funds and contractors; Edgewood has a cost-sharing program, and also has monitoring money; Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District is also thinning its watersheds through a levy; the federal Environmental Quality Incentives Fund is available to farmers who want to improve the environment on their land; we need to get the word out and get funding to the proper channels; funding for monitoring needs to be encouraged, so that information is brought together so that it is useful, particularly for the Water Trust Fund

### **Other Comments/Questions:**

- Concern with how all this information from the 29 public meetings will be synthesized and used in the Town Hall
- Concern with the deadline for the state water plan; the regional water planning program should continue to be funded and honored by the state program