



**Comments from State Water Plan Public Meeting: Raton  
Raton Convention Center, 901 South 3<sup>rd</sup> Street**

**Thursday, July 10, 2003; 7:00 – 9:00 pm**

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The public meeting in Raton was the second 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 and Interstate Stream Commissioner Julia Davis Stafford welcomed approximately 35 people who attended the public meeting from Colfax County, including Raton, Maxwell and other 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.

**Stewardship:**

*What do you value about water?*

- We can't waste and we have to watch every drop
- We've been through two water studies in Colfax County, one at Eagle's Nest, the other...are you going to take these studies into consideration?
- From a municipality standpoint it behooves us to reuse water the best we can, and I feel that reusing water will benefit any community in New Mexico; they aren't making

anymore water and they aren't making anymore groundwater; it costs money but it's worth it

- Drinking water of good quality
- Clean up the rivers, especially non-native species that are hoarding the water
- It's important that the state keeps the local people involved and protects people's water rights.
- How concerned should we be that the state is going to give away our water rights or have them diminished? Of course we're concerned...we might be country bumpkins and there are those thirsty cities to the south
- Will the plan affect our water rights? Old water rights still have the highest priority; the State Engineer basically said that we will still practice our water rights by right of priority
- The State Engineer doesn't have much of a backbone when it comes to administering water rights...there doesn't seem to be much enforcement of the water rights; he basically said that the nation will need to combine the prior appropriation doctrine of the West with the riparian doctrine used primarily in the east; so as ranchers and others we need to make sure that we put the water to beneficial use and make sure that we protect it; That is a threat
- My personal opinion is that water law will evolve and we should put this in the plan
- Acequias all share in shortages; this could be challenged by other rights holders; also a State Engineer responsibility
- This is dry country
- We love recreation here, we love hunting, fishing etc. and it's a lifestyle kind of value

### **Balancing Supply And Demand:**

*How to balance supply and demand, what values would guide decisions?*

- If you are talking about balancing, then you need to have fair compensation
- Are we reinventing the wheel; isn't this already in our statutes?
- Domestic users need to become aware of the benefits of agriculture; education is needed to do that
- I think the education of the public is going to be a very important thing, i.e. the humidity in Phoenix is much higher than it would be in a natural state
- Education of people on water is very important
- My brother lives in Reno, and everyone was irrigating their lawns and there are lots of cities in the west that are still getting a flat fee and not metered, it's a waste of water
- Rather than sitting back and saying "Those damn people in the cities..." we need to get involved and practice what we preach

- There needs to be balance
- Just get together as a county to get a plan in place and think ahead rather than waiting for the golf course to get in, we should plan ahead
- Everyone in Raton is watering their lawn tonight and a third of them are watering the street; I saw a park that was watered, and they were flooding the street
- Why does agriculture use take a back seat to people in the city so that their gardens can get more?
- Our agriculture in Colfax County isn't the strongest...so you better keep the little ranches and local ranches
- We need some water for beautification to have some beauty in our life; look at Springer; they had no water last year and everything is dried up and the flowers are scraggly
- It's part of education; you can grow beautiful flowers...with less water – good stewardship in gardening
- Devil's advocate: 75 percent of water is used by agriculture; looking at your chart if the State's going to step-in, then we need to look at delivery mechanisms, because we have some real inefficiency in how we move water; If you are going to use public funds you want to look at how high a return you are going to get, especially if you use public funds
- Two percent of the people work in agriculture, but uses 75 percent of the water; So 98 percent of the people are removed from agriculture; we need those 2 percent to work hard and educate the 98 percent
- Water is lost in moving it to the point of use; there is potential return for excess water
- Evaporation and percolation loses about 50 percent of the water; we could cut losses and save lots of water
- Concerns expressed last night about the point of capture; we need to talk about how the water is captured to point of delivery – watershed restoration; if we could get those watersheds in better shape, then we we'd all be better off because we'd have more water to capture; if you could capture just one percent or one-tenth of one percent, the amount of water that falls is huge compared to the amount that's used
- Speak of beneficial use and the Governor before he was Governor the “use it or lose it”; has their been any thought as to how we can handle this?
- There were a couple of bills passed at the legislature the transfers and the water banking and there are some good things the Governor has signed...
- Thirty years ago the Federal Government had a little bit more towards acequias with the cost sharing, now it seems like the cities come along and they have the money and the acequias are told, if you want it, you do it
- They tie your hands...if you hit a well they would say cap it

- There's no extra water anywhere in a year like this; we are over-adjudicated as it is; there are more water rights than there is water

## **Drought:**

*How would your values change during the magnified challenges of drought?*

- Coal camp families would go out and fetch buckets of water out of a mobile 500-gallon tank and they would use 4 or 5 gallons a day; we shouldn't have to go that drastic during a drought
- Perhaps tap some water inflow in abandoned mines in drought years? Also, gravel beds
- Anytime that we can stay another year, it's good; we shouldn't have to move people to water like we move cattle to water
- Be honest about what they are doing
- Decision makers are more likely to focus on the large population centers; need a little red flag to make sure they take care of folks in the outskirts, not just the masses; small people sometimes lose out
- I think that you should ban bluegrass; it takes a lot of water that could be used otherwise
- Wash dishes less; there are a lot of water savings in the way you irrigate
- Irrigation methods can save water
- In ranching and farming, we have sold a lot of livestock, and we have parked our equipment; we own the water rights, and if there is no water, we can just shut down; Towns and cities can't just shut down, and they don't have the flexibility to shut down on their water use; this flexibility inherent in the ranching and farming community is a value
- I think that there are things that can be done in cities, too; you can make sacrifices in where you use water
- People in Raton don't feel a sense of urgency; it's an example of a place without incentives to cut back on water use; we're fortunate to have surface water sources; not only no incentives, but also, no penalization for excess use
- Tourism is listed as second most valuable industry, therefore, beautification counts even if it does cost water

## **Water Administration:**

*What values would you follow in the administration and management of water rights?*

- State Engineer does not have enough backbone to administer and enforce water rights
- Having database in useable form
- Mechanisms for management – we need a functioning system for keeping track of stuff – efficiency of system operations are a prerequisite for administering water banking, etc?
- Don't know enough about water quantity or water use
- There are no requirements for measuring devices – metering; Fairness – everyone should have metering; otherwise, no one knows if water right is being used
- Too much waste water in ditches, eating up a lot of the water; it got started when water was plentiful; need to educate users; get rid of weeds and other trash in ditches; non-native phreatophytes drink up a lot of water
- State Engineer's office could have more Water Masters and more folks in the field watching what is going on
- The one at the top of the ditch has the most water right; some people take more water than is allowed
- Sharing and balancing water in time of shortage; water masters could help with dealing with times of shortage
- Maybe water transfer by pipe rather than by open ditch, to prevent loss
- Infiltration occurs in earth ditches; it doesn't flow to Texas; if we put it in a pipe, it's all going to go to Texas; water in ditches isn't actually lost forever – it returns to the subsurface
- Water in a pipeline allows you to have more water to use; one of the more beneficial things to do is to get it in pipes
- If you put it in a pipe, you lose some of the recharge and what fuels evapotranspiration
- Doesn't go back in the stream; sometimes the plant life takes it out of the system; some losses do occur due to the riparian vegetation
- This is an issue for more data; would need to know the tradeoffs if decision was made to put water in a pipe
- There are too many lawyers in the State Engineers office; adjudications just go on forever
- More administration by the Office of the State Engineer; Maxwell doesn't like to have only the option to sue; if Office of the State Engineer did administration, it would eliminate some of these problems
- A lot of people in the City know it is a drought when there is water rationing; they don't know it before
- I'm concerned that summer rains make folks think that drought is relieved, but lack of snowpack is an issue; differences in way those two are handled

- In Texas, they pay for the cleanup of streams of salt cedar (their government is), and they are saving a lot of water; salt cedar uses 1.5 million gallon of water per acre; we need help doing it here, too
- New Mexico paid Texas \$18 million for failing to deliver water; Texas then used those funds to eradicate salt cedar on the Pecos; an acre of salt cedar uses 1.5 million acre-feet of water per year
- I heard that Texas doubled their water yield by eradicating salt cedar and willow from the riparian area of the Pecos
- The joke is on Texas, as we are sending them all of our seed
- Senator Domenici has three bills in right now; one has to do with dealing with salt cedar, primarily for the Rio Grande; Forest thinning for the Santa Fe watershed is second one; Third thing (on Senate floor next week) is all SJC water must be used for Ag or municipal use, not for the Rio Grande silvery minnow; Forest Guardians are threatening lawsuits, and it hasn't even passed yet

### **Funding:**

*Trudy Healy --- member of the Water Trust Board attending the meeting*

*This might be a good time to explain Water Trust Board. Now reading 146 grant proposals that total \$500 M +, and have only \$5 - \$10 M. Most are for storage and new dams. Water Trust Board is part of triangle, because Office of the State Engineer deals with adjudications, and Interstate Stream Commission deals with compacts. That is why Water Trust Board is for the people. Have a big job ahead. Governor wants to build up to \$200M. We need to look at projects that help communities, not just a few people. It's going to be very hard to decide. What has been said here reflects many of the grant proposals. Needs to be flexible for now. Six out of 16 regional plans completed leaves out a lot of folks if funding can only go to those with completed plans. We all have to work towards helping the State Engineer come up with a water plan. County Commissioners are the most powerful folks, because they are the ones that can say no to new wells.*

*We are the New Mexico Finance Authority's bosses. Our goal is to prioritize 146 projects. Fifteen of us with different interests. If county commissioners can figure out how to pay for the little projects, then Water Trust Board can work on the larger projects. There is a project – restoration of watershed on Ute Creek – that is direct result of Water Trust Board.*

*Questions of attendees for Trudy:*

*Will it develop jobs, or is it just money being passed on?*

*Major benefit is making more water available.*

*Can decent jobs that can be relied upon be a part of this development of water? Can we use development of water to produce jobs in the area as a way of making a living?*

*What values would you follow as funding is developed and spending decisions are made?*

- Have a plan in place to prioritize spending; best bang for buck, rather than parceling out a little bit to various areas
- Rural New Mexico needs
- It's a little like taxes, the richer get richer; you can't just count the population; Look less at population, but where you will get good gain, water-wise; Look at the water but not the population
- Criteria should be to stabilize communities or to help people get on their feet
- Using airplanes to spray salt cedar – need to hire workers
- In some areas, recreation is a byproduct of having more water
- Farm Bill and EQIP cost share

### **Other Public Comments and Questions:**

- I think Colfax County is primarily a ranching community and the second is tourism; and I think we need water for both
- If you rehabilitate your watershed, who gets the water?
- Endangered Species Act should be null and void
- Some of us grew up in the era when fish had no water rights
- Farmers are the endangered species
- Openness to alternative ways to do things; State usually uses University of New Mexico or other state entities; concern about state-funded projects that haven't worked
- The Constitution left powers that weren't given to Congress and the President, to the states; State Water Plan should state that water is a state issue, and should be stated very specifically
- There should be priorities in a drought, and humans should take priority; fish shouldn't be the priority
- Question: we spent \$373K and man-hours on Regional Water Plans. How much overlap? Are we going to reinvent the wheel?
- Colfax County Commissioners are in process of developing a policy implementing the Colfax Regional Water Plans
- Scary process with Endangered Species Act and Feds; assumed that of all places, Albuquerque could have avoided that situation; State Water Plan needs to address that state could control its own water interests