



**Comments from New Mexico State Water Plan Public Meeting:
Silver City
County Administration Center
Thursday, August 14, 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 Silver City, New Mexico. This was the 17th 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 welcomed over 60 people who attended the public meeting from areas in and around Silver City. Rhea 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:

- Take care of our streams and watersheds otherwise we're spinning our wheels
- Restore these watersheds – they are in horrible shape; get the State, US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to cooperate in restoring the watersheds
- Conservation by homeowners and Education about the consequences of wasting
- Protecting our groundwater and surface water from contamination
- Education and conservation but also increase the use of gray water
- I was raised on the Mimbres River, and we have to put agriculture as a top priority
- Regarding the Mimbres, we need to clean up our creeks and arroyos, and stop using them for solid waste disposal
- We need to get our children involved in conservation
- From kindergarten all the way through college
- I think we need to monitor the mines a little bit more, so that we can know what is going into our drinking water
- I have gone to the Office of the State Engineer to monitor the homes in the Mimbres, and I would like to know how much solid waste is going into the Mimbres from the septic systems from the homes
- In the Service, we were taught to take a shower and get wet, soap up, then turn the shower on and that might be a part of an education; this is sort of an education around the little habits we can change to conserve water
- Put the water in the cup to brush your teeth, don't let the faucet run
- Use common sense
- The Federal government can pay for the seeding of clouds
- Are we going to wind up with something at the end of this, and then we follow something that's written down like the law?
- How many contaminants are added to each dishwasher and each washing machine – how much do they contaminate the environment? Fewer dishwashers
- The Gila River got cleaned up by eliminating the camping down there, monitoring and restricting campers could keep an area cleaned up

Balancing Supply and Demand:

- The doctrine of prior appropriation should be followed; there is no question
- We either need to decrease the demand or increase the supply, for instance we might try cloud seeding
- Maybe blow some of those clouds from the east coast using big fans, then seed the clouds
- I've done some heavy reading on cloud seeding, and some states up north complained; they are going to do some seeding experiments on the hurricanes in Florida, they threw out pounds of dry ice, and that didn't work – they should have

been throwing out tones of dry ice; the point is to study something thoroughly, before embarking on an experiment

- There are millions of acres of land being developed; make sure that agricultural uses are given a high priority; water flows uphill to money
- Have the State Engineer come out with guidelines every year so that areas could monitor their use...again part of education; maybe people would then limit their use
- Efficiency and education of agricultural uses should be pursued, and not just on agricultural use, but also, on community uses, such as lawns etc.
- When thinking of supply and demand, don't forget the health of the river, because we cannot make it without the health of the river and the other creatures that use it
- The state needs to capitalize on the water rights that it does have such as the 18,000 acre feet of Central Arizona Project water
- The state should carefully consider the utilization of water in power generation facilities, i.e. in Deming they use 11,000 gallons of water for cooling towers, and about 75% of the energy produced, leaves the state
- Water is being taken from us by Mexico, we should protect our water from others
- We should look at our Nation; can't we get our prisoners out of prison and make them work? They could be building us canals to ship the water from the East; this is a national problem; if water is wasted, let's put it to work
- Use desalination plants if it's cost effective; make the judgment on good science
- We need to build Hooker Dam, and all of us have been saying the same thing
- I saw this article in the paper, and it says it costs about \$1,036/household to desalinate, and in Idaho it costs only \$30/household with a new process
- Discourage municipalities from selling their water to corporations
- We get about 7 to 14 inches of rain on an average over the last 100 years; somewhere we need to get into the regulations water harvesting –it would give a lot of water
- The dollar motivates everything; we need economics plugged into how to control supply and demand
- Back to water harvesting...I would suggest tax credits for water harvesting
- There are so many agencies you have to deal with, that by the time you get around to the idea, they will do everything possible to shoot it down; we are trying to pump water up to Fort Bayard that will finally result in a wetlands...then the EPA said we are just going to pump it so far; we tried to do a good thing and the government shot it down
- Get agencies to cooperate, use your common sense and don't let a good project die
- We need to get back to prior appropriation; before we catch water we need to understand what this going to do for the doctrine of prior appropriation
- I want to support what was said that we need to get that water back up to Fort Bayard, those animals are dying
- Provide state funding for effluent reuse, we could save a lot of water, make regulations and funding consistent around the state, provide effluent for golf courses

- Town and municipalities should get out of the practice of serving areas outside of their municipal boundaries
- Agencies and communities should cooperate; let's build on the opportunities between us
- Local incentives for saving water
- In the 1940's the logging was huge and the water table went way down, they planted more trees and the water table went up again; now I am concerned about the President's logging plan; we need trees for rain
- Dollars should not be used for water going over the fence to Mexico
- Continue the thinning; if it's supported, it can help the reconstruction of our watersheds, and maybe help the groundwater supply and the health of the aquifer. For example, Support Bingaman's legislation; one type of small thinning logging will help the watershed, the other will not
- The after effects of a burn will be great; grazing now for an ounce of prevention
- Let's get our facts together before we act
- I think getting the facts is important about the density of our forests, for instance the transpiration of our trees; we need to look at the optimal density and then achieve it; we don't want to be left with just the scorched earth
- Spending millions of taxpayer dollars on good thinning projects could create many jobs
- We are not drinking enough beer
- We want to save water...we enjoy the good things but we might want to change our behavior

Drought:

- Agriculture has to be a top priority, to have food during drought, so agricultural uses have the top priority
- Have a set of priorities for certain crops during a drought; if you are going to have any control during a drought, you will have to put a moratorium on subdivision development
- More efficient ways of irrigating crops; there has to be a better way for pecan orchards, for instance
- Carrying water from washing dishes to pour on outdoor plants and trees
- We have to think about shifting our agriculture so that it is more drought tolerant; changing climate and landscape; get facts together and learn from places that have a history of dealing with drought, such as the Middle East and northern New Mexico
- Maybe change laws about water rights; if you live in the Cliff-Gila area, you may get fined if you take your dishwasher outside to water plants, because you can only use water indoors with your water right; water laws should support conservation and reuse - a new grey water law was passed
- It may not be practicable to have flood irrigation; just because there is land doesn't mean that it has to be subjected to agriculture; there may be better

uses for some land other than agriculture; grow crops where the land supports them

- There may be a point where people need to live on a hill; agricultural products raised here are found in other countries
- Are we trying to feed the world?
- I think that we have to emphasize agriculture as a priority, because it is a billion dollar industry in New Mexico; it's not that simple to just not water agricultural land, but we can afford not to water golf courses
- One thing that everyone in this room can agree on is that there should be no privatization of water; when private firms bought the water system, they were run out of the country for raising water prices so high
- Water rights are private property right in New Mexico, so I would hope that lawmakers abide by our State Constitution and U.S. Constitution during times of drought, including protecting priority rights
- Maybe during a drought would be a good time to look at how distribution of water rights impact people
- That wouldn't work, because people in town don't own the right, so they aren't as likely to conserve as the people who own the water right; people in rural areas who own a water right should be able to use it as they see fit; it comes down to individuals conserving
- Promote xeriscaping always, not just during times of drought; maybe tax credits to promote it
- If you don't use it, you lose it – this is a contradiction to conservation; so you waste the water because you don't want to lose your right; if you own it, you should be able to relax your land or not use it
- Drought may be localized; one government agency says that we have a drought and another says that we don't; get facts that make some sense

Water Administration and Management:

- Primary concern in southwestern New Mexico is that state and federal government should allocate our water for us, and not using it to pay other water debts in Arizona; it should be used in New Mexico to benefit New Mexicans; this is a tremendous duty for the Interstate Stream Commission
- As a statewide thing, we should avoid interbasin transfers throughout the state; basins have been dewatered by interbasin transfers
- Silver City gets a lot of its water from the Gila-San Francisco, which is from another basin
- I would like to see some enforcement of priority dates; we spent a lot of time in court to get adjudications and priority dates, but they aren't being enforced
- I think that the administrators need to take each case on an individual basis if possible; not just a blanket seven-year plan
- Maybe somebody knows the science behind this question: why is it that you lose acre-feet when it is transferred from agriculture to urban use?

- You really don't lose it; if you change from agricultural to municipal or industrial, you get the consumptive use, but not the diversion right; even if you put 3.08 acre-feet on the field, the crop only uses 1.6 acre-feet, and the 1.6 acre-feet is the consumptive use in the city, so it is about the same
- It was brought up under stewardship that the main thing on water administration was common sense on making decisions
- I would like to point out once again that it is hard to understand why rain falls on New Mexico, but it belongs to some other state
- Just because somebody has a lot of money it doesn't mean that they will use it the best way; I don't want the powers that be to be blinded by money
- How do you reach out with education? Don't just preach to the choir
- We need to educate people; if they know how water works in times of drought, there is a lot of creativity when people know what needs to be done
- Folks in Santa Fe allowed 14 miles of the Pecos River below Brantley Dam to go dry, while the water table in wells in the State of Texas went up.
- How did Texas get jurisdiction of water below Elephant Butte Reservoir? Why does Texas control our portion of New Mexico's water?

Funding:

- Need to fund water quality, watershed improvement
- Use funding for New Mexico's uses, not out-of-state uses
- Water users should be in some part responsible for the expenses of water administration
- Measuring and metering gives us good information on supply and the use of water

Other Comments/Questions:

- Why does Texas get New Mexico's water on the Pecos and Rio Grande?

Q: Will it be possible to get a copy of the comments made today.

A: Yes, they will be on the website, and you should read them there, compiled by site location.

Q: If I don't have a computer, how do I get comments?

A: Fill out a comment sheet and ask that staff send you the comments from this meeting.