



## 2009 State Water Plan Update Public Outreach

**Region: Middle Rio Grande**  
**UNM Continuing Education Building Auditorium**  
**Albuquerque, NM**  
**May 7, 2009**

### **Summary of Discussion**

Facilitator/Recorder: Lucy Moore

### **Welcome and Introductions**

New Mexico State Engineer John D'Antonio welcomed the group of about 75 to this public forum sponsored jointly by the Office of the State Engineer and the Interstate Stream Commission (OSE/ISC). He introduced agency staff and contractors:

Gretel Follingstad, State Water Planner  
Rolf Schmidt-Petersen, ISC Rio Grande Basin Manager  
Amy Haas, ISC Legal Counsel  
Martha Frank, Legal Counsel (contracted)  
Karin Stangl, Planning and Communications Director  
Maureen Haney, Communications Specialist  
Nancy Cunningham Rodriguez, District I (Albuquerque) Water Resources Supervisor  
Angela Bordegaray, State Water Planner

### **Presentation**

Follingstad presented an overview of New Mexico's state and regional water planning process including data on population, water supply and demands, and an overview of the Middle Rio Grande Regional Water Plan.

### **Questions and Comments on Presentation**

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

Comment: Participants asked about waste disposal and cost-benefit analyses relating to desalination projects.  
Response: D'Antonio noted that desalinating deep brackish water holds potential as a new source of water, but that the cost is a significant factor. Compared to El Paso, which has spent \$87 million on its desalination project, the Sandoval County proposal anticipates a higher cost per gallon recovered. In addition, the water

quality is poorer quality and the yield of water will be less per gallon pumped, there will also be a greater portion of waste to be disposed. He added that a regional facility with pipelines to outlier wells might make the most economic sense. In an answer to another question, he said that the reclaimed water would probably be used for new growth since the basin is already fully appropriated. D'Antonio added that although the Governor signed a bill authorizing his office to regulate deep wells over 2,500 feet deep, up to 1.3 million acre-feet of these waters were claimed prior to that signing and will remain unregulated.

Comment: A staff person from the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), Surface Water Quality Bureau, Watershed Protection Section, urged the state to seriously address surface quality issues in the revised plan. The quality of water is directly related to, and impacts all water uses.

Response: D'Antonio agreed and added that the Governor's Water Cabinet is a forum where water quality often takes center stage.

Comment: Some participants expressed confusion about the pie chart showing the percentage of uses. The pie chart shows commercial, industrial, mining and power uses to be 4 percent in the Middle Rio Grande Region while for the state as a whole that figure is closer to 10 percent. Further, the Middle Rio Grande figure includes the new nuclear project at Sandia National Laboratories.

Response: OSE staff clarified that the pie chart refers to withdrawals, not depletions.

Comment: A participant urged state planners to focus on conservation statewide and to take into consideration the progress that has already been made in the Middle Rio Grande 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?***

- **Limit population:** This could ensure that growth is managed according to available water supplies. Later another participant suggested moving people to the water, rather than moving the water to the people. D'Antonio pointed out that the OSE's role is to protect and administer water rights, and that decisions relating to population growth are in the jurisdiction of local government. Planning commissions make decisions about subdivision size and location, for instance. They are often torn between the need for tax base and economic development and the need to conserve resources. Making tough choices takes political strength.
- **Coordination with land use ordinances:** The state water plan should work with land use ordinances and the decisions for or against development. A statewide land use plan should be developed to complement the State Water Plan.

- Take careful consideration in water transfers: Transferring water from one region to another can have detrimental impacts on the depleted region. D'Antonio agreed that it is a challenge to determine a reasonable amount of water to transfer keeping in mind the necessity to protect the basin of origin.
- Refer to the public welfare statement: The public welfare standard in the State Water Plan (and the 16 regional plans) should help inform these decisions.
- Conservation education: One participant suggested a statewide water conservation education program for existing and new residents to help them understand the need to conserve water and some strategies for doing so.
- Water re-use programs: Programs for gray water and effluent to help conserve water were suggested. It was noted that re-use does not reduce current consumption.

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?***

- State regulations for water conservation: Create strategies for new construction and retrofitting old buildings. This would provide an additional water source that would be more cost-effective than desalination. Provide low-water-use guidelines for all new developments.
- Enforce Active Water Resources Management (AWRM): This program at the OSE could provide for a more efficient use of existing water. D'Antonio agreed, saying that he was hopeful the program would show significant results soon. The mechanism will allow short-term transfers of water from agriculture to municipal (shortage sharing), without sacrificing water rights or personal property rights. The legal requirements for short-term leases may take two to three years, making needed "active management" impossible. The OSE is awaiting a court decision on these issues. He noted that shortage sharing agreements have been very effective in recent years in the San Juan Basin.
- Energy-water relationship: Links between energy and water should have heightened priority. Wind power, for instance, reduces water use, whereas solar and coal-fired and other forms of energy production increase water use. Wind power could be used, he suggested, to pump and store water at higher elevations. Water could then be delivered by gravity flow. If energy is being exported, a participant added, so is water, indirectly.

- Wind power problems: A participant expressed concern about the electrical transmission lines associated with the wind farms.
- Obstacles to achieving sustainability: A participant noted that achieving sustainability goals is the dynamic of money and political power. Together, these forces make alternative energy, conservation, and growth management more difficult. This should be addressed in the State Water Plan Update strategies.
- Environmental impact statement: A participant suggested that there is a need for the state to adopt an Environmental Impact Statement process, mirroring the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Specifically, impacts such as the waste created by desalination need to be evaluated carefully in advance of such projects.
- State planning collaboration: One participant suggested integrating the New Mexico State Water Plan with other statewide plans including the Transportation Plan, Education Plan and others for a more unified, effective result.
- Water regulations: Large urban and municipal areas need more enforcement on outdoor watering.
- Water use figures: A participant questioned the per capita use of 156 gallons per person a day, saying that the figure seems high. It was noted that the figure includes municipal and industrial uses of water in the region, which is then divided by the population.
- Watershed Management: This was suggested as one of the best ways to naturally manage water resources. State agencies should be held accountable. Soil and Water Conservation District and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) representatives offered information on their active programs.

**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?***

- Climate predictions: A participant who has been studying climate change and CO<sub>2</sub> data from the last 15 years offered predictions about increased temperatures and decreased precipitation (by 25 percent) in the Southwest in future years. Any long range water planning needs to take into account these significant changes. He suggested forming a task force to follow the work of the international conferences and studies relating to climate change. D'Antonio added that these trends point the

state in the direction of adapting the available supply in the most creative ways possible. AWRM for instance can be used to move water to where it is needed most, given a variable supply.

- Conservation policy enforcement based on thresholds: An audience member urged the state to set thresholds that would trigger certain mandatory conservation measures. The thresholds could apply to temperature increases, surface flow reductions, population increases, precipitation decreases, etc.
- A participant noted that more violent weather seems to occur during the late evenings.
- Learn about the world around us: A participant urged citizens and OSE/ISC staff alike to understand that we live in a desert and that it always has been and always will be. We need to develop creative and realistic solutions (not just band aids) to be able to live here sustainably.
- Sensible water management: Create a more pragmatic approach and better enforcement of water laws to avoid unknown excess use. There is a need for final adjudication statewide and programs that enforce living within our water means.
- OSE needs to be careful about the accuracy of its data: When transfers are granted, for instance, how is the land being used? Has agricultural land been developed? The water right should match the reality of the land use at the time. The State Engineer responded that his enforcement arm works to reduce double-dipping and to ensure that the wet water and the paper rights are congruent.

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

- Water re-use projects: These should be a priority in the State Water Plan. Effluent should be used for outdoor watering.
- Support for water planning based on population projections: Since Rio Rancho is expected to double in 30 years, serious water planning is no longer a luxury but a necessity. A participant suggested that within the audience there existed considerable power to advocate for adequate funding for comprehensive water planning. He cited that Texas is spending \$1 per capita on water planning, and New Mexico only spends \$0.02 per person. Population growth patterns/migration is not an independent variable, he added. It is closely tied to other factors, including water availability.

- Complete adjudications: Adjudicating the Middle Rio Grande Region should be a priority.
- Prioritize and value local agriculture: Support for local crops and food is necessary. Farmers could be encouraged to grow higher value crops if there were a local market for them. An additional benefit would be saving – economically and environmentally – on transportation. Drip irrigation can result in a more efficient use of water for a targeted root zone.
- Recharge projects in conjunction with farmland irrigation: A participant notes that approximately half of what is diverted seeps into the shallow aquifer.
- Educate developers: Stress to them the need to preserve. Do not develop agricultural lands.
- Don't penalize agriculture: Do not go after the agriculture sector when further reductions are needed, it should be understood that many farms have already reduced as much as they can.
- Agricultural collaborative programs: Promote management programs for agricultural interests and communities to coordinate to promote their interests. Acequias have worked in recent years to ensure that water remains in the basin of origin. State law now recognizes the right of an acequia association to prevent transfer of water, if so stated in bylaws. Some acequias also now have water banks in place as a way of allowing water leasing within the community. This kind of advocacy can lead to the development of a political will.
- Better understanding of water processes: Planning for the future of water requires thinking holistically about the unintended consequences. Decision-makers may need help making these important connections. For instance, drip irrigation decreases the amount of recharge from ditches. There are relationships between diversion and consumption that need to be fully understood.
- Promote urban conservation: Xeriscaping and smart outdoor water use is essential.
- Water budget modeling: Fund a Graphic Information Systems (GIS) based water budget interactive modeling project.
- Coordinated natural resource management: Create a program to connect land use and water for sustainable resource management and managed growth.

- Clarify and standardize water budget: Establish standardized set of clear water accounting principles for entire state.
- Stress water management tools: Metering and monitoring program should be implemented for ALL water uses throughout the state.

***Additional comments:***

Follingstad thanked the participants for attending and contributing to the State Water Plan Update and reminded the group that there are a variety of ways to comment on the state water planning process, including visiting the OSE/ISC website, the comment form or by email. She then thanked everyone for their comments and their commitment to helping make the State Water Plan as comprehensive and useful as possible.

***Announcements:***

- A representative of the Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District invited those interested in watershed restoration to join various agencies and organizations that meet as part of the NMED Action Strategy. The meetings are the first Monday of every month at the Albuquerque NRCS building.
- The Mid Region Council of Governments is hosting an agricultural celebration on May 16.
- The Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly is holding its annual conference June 13, UNM Dane Smith Hall, 8:30 – 3:00. Theme is “Water for a Growing Population: What Will it Cost You?” details at [www.waterassembly.org](http://www.waterassembly.org)

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