



2009 State Water Plan Update Public Meeting

Region: Colfax
Sister Hildegarde Smith Parish Hall
Cimarron, NM
May 13, 2009

Summary of Discussion

Facilitator/Recorder: Bruce Poster

Welcome and Introductions

Angela Bordegaray, State Water Planner with the Interstate Stream Commission, welcomed the group of about 30 to this public forum sponsored jointly by the Office of the State Engineer and the Interstate Stream Commission (OSE/ISC). She introduced agency staff and contractors:

Julie Maas, Communications Specialist
Mark Murphy, ISC Canadian Basin Manager
Tim Farmer, OSE District VII (Cimarron) Supervisor
Greg Quartieri, OSE District VII Water Resource Specialist
Katherine Behrendson, OSE District VII Administrator
Alfred (Buster) Chavez, OSE District VII Water Master
Matt Bogar, ISC Eagle Nest Dam Caretaker
Richard Trujillo, OSE Community Liaison (Santa Fe)

Other members of the audience included Julia Davis Stafford, Interstate Stream Commissioner and member of the Colfax Regional Water Plan Steering Committee. Many members of the Colfax Soil and Water Conservation District, which led the plan's development and served as its fiscal agent, were also present. Numerous public officials and staff from the City of Raton, and the Towns of Springer and Eagle Nest, as well the Village of Cimarron attended the meeting. Representatives from US Senator Tom Udall's office and US Representative Ben Lujan's office also attended.

Presentation

Bordegaray presented an overview of the New Mexico's state and regional water planning process including data on population, water supply and demands, and an overview of the Colfax Regional Water Plan. The ISC accepted the plan in 2003. The plan is available on the OSE/ISC website at: http://www.ose.state.nm.us/isc_regional_plans9.html.

The Colfax Region encompasses all of Colfax County. Its principal river basins are the Vermejo River and Cimarron River, which are tributaries to the Canadian River. The region is bounded on the north by the Colorado, on the west by Taos County, on the south by Mora County, and on the east by Union County. The region's water sources are 95 percent surface water and 5 percent groundwater. Irrigated agriculture accounts for 83 percent of the water used in the region; followed by 11 percent reservoir evaporation and 4 percent used for public water supply and domestic use.

Questions and Comments on Presentation

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

Question: A member of the audience asked about the population data presented.

[Note: as presented, the regional population is projected to increase by 2,750 people by 2040.]

Question: Another member asked about water rights adjudication in times of drought.

Answer: OSE contract attorney Martha Franks responded that the OSE has measures in place for negotiating agreements to allow for priority water calls in times of shortage.

Question: A participant asked if there is more storage possibility at Eagle Nest Lake.

Answer: Julia Davis Stafford, a member of the Interstate Stream Commission and of the Colfax County Regional Planning Steering Committee replied that storage was included as a strategy in the water plan.

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?

- Forecast methodology: There were several questions about the population forecast methodology and what was behind the large potential future water supply-demand gap, given that population is not expected to grow very fast.
- [Staff note: For purposes of the State Water Plan meetings, a graph was prepared for each region that showed the amount of water diverted in 2005, as reported by the Office of the State Engineer, in comparison to the high projected water use as reported in the applicable regional water plan. For the Colfax Region, there was a large gap between the high projection and the reported use (85,100 acre-feet), and a question was raised regarding the size of this gap. Supporting data indicated that

this gap was largely due to the irrigated agriculture sector. *While the regional planning group recognized that the amount of acreage in production is not expected to increase, it was felt that the high projection should reflect fulfilling existing water rights.* In the Colfax Planning Region, all the surface water has been adjudicated. Therefore, fulfillment of the adjudicated water rights could easily be tabulated. In other regions where adjudications have not been completed, there is no tabulation of adjudicated water rights, and a comparable analysis could not be performed. The projected drought scenario was also depicted, showing an even greater gap between water supply and demand in 2040 (133,100 acre-feet). Because this region is so dependent on surface water, there is great variability with respect to water supply.]

- Importing water: Two participants commented on importing excess water from outside the region, like from the Mississippi River.
- Limiting development: More local land use regulation to limit development.
- Drought and growth: The drought will limit the ability to manage additional growth.
- More well regulation: Participants encouraged the regulation of domestic wells.
- Protect current adjudicated water rights: One participant suggested this and OSE staff responded that state legislation was passed this year to prevent municipalities from condemning agricultural water rights outside of cities. Active Water Resource Management is being used to protect water rights.
- Local water loss issues: Obstructions in the Cimarron River (e.g. beaver dams and debris near Ponil) lead to wasting water. Also, new wells are drawing water away from the system.
- Add storage capacity: Participants suggested increased storage for water in times of need.
- Population data: In presenting population information, distinguish between regional and state population forecasts.
- Fire prevention: Encourage fire-wise communities statewide.

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?***

- Use low-flow fixtures: For example, toilets, showers, sinks, drip irrigation, etc. that go beyond national water conservation standards.
- Education: Prioritize water use and conservation education.
- Use the regional water plan recommendations: For example, the plan suggests providing funds for conservation projects through revolving loan funds.
- Fund agricultural conservation: A participant noted that acequias do get some funding for ditch lining but that the law should be changed so that conservation and irrigation districts also qualify. Funding needs to go to public entities. For example, Raton’s wastewater plant needed in a county where public water use is only 4 percent.
- OSE’s Richard Trujillo noted that funding is available to acequias, and more acequias are requesting funding for pipes.
- Losing water rights: Participants expressed concern that conservation could lead to loss of water rights. In fact, that water can be used elsewhere, so it is not lost.
- Prevent water loss from dams and rivers: One participant suggested piping the water instead to reduce losses. Other participants were concerned such projects could have a negative impact on the environment and recreation and suggested cleaning the channel instead.
- Consider the value of return flow (“recharge”): A participant said that when recharge is accounted for not all the water is really “lost.”
- Protect agriculture – as it “feeds” us.
- Protect nature, too.
- Resolve riparian conflicts: These “trade-offs” of healthy riparian areas for growth need to be solved.

- Not all water rights are being used every year (especially not in wet years).
- Question: When did paper water first exceed wet water?
Answer: Attorney Martha Franks responded. From the beginning priorities are set, but the water may not be there. The water market can address bringing water to where the need is greatest.
- Use extra state-owned water to meet gaps: ISC's Mark Murphy clarified that the Strategic Water Reserve is a mechanism for protecting water rights for public benefit. The criteria are that the water rights be related to compact compliance or endangered species.

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?*

- There has been drought since the late 1980's.
- Winters have gotten milder.
- Winds are stronger.
- There has been intense rain in small areas, leading to localized flooding.
- Water storage: A participant said that water should be stored underground to reduce evaporative losses.
- Drought plan: One participant suggested developing a plan for drought years.
- Drought incentives: Offer incentives to cut use during droughts or at peak times of use.
- Education, including in the schools: Curriculum should impart value of water and its true costs.
- Harvest rainwater: Harvest for local use only and offer tax credits for water harvesting.

- Develop water-sharing agreements: A participant suggested this would protect municipalities during droughts and prioritize needs for that water, to ensure public uses (e.g. parks).
- Planning integration: The 40-year municipal plans should be compared and integrated into the regional plan.
- Establish hours of allowable water use during droughts: It was noted that this is already done in many municipalities.

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

- Restore storage facilities: The Vermejo District, for example, needs to be dredged to restore its original capacities.
- Build pipelines: This infrastructure would enable communities to import water.
- Restore/dredge dams: Restore dams that are currently in place but are no longer being used.
- Repair failing water lines and other infrastructure.
- Fund smaller entities: Allow small districts and private operators to qualify for funds for better ditches.
- Do watershed management/biofuel projects.
- Build underground storage.
- Repair Eagle Nest Dam: It was noted that ISC manages Eagle Nest Dam but it is owned by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.
- Develop regional water and wastewater systems: For example, in the Moreno Valley.
- Education: Educational programs are a cost-effective way to increase awareness.

- Well-monitoring: Monitor private wells outside municipalities and enforce the law.
- Septic system monitoring: Ensure water quality by monitoring septic systems.
- Cut down on re-subdividing lots.
- Increase land-use densities: This would help in reducing waste of water. Create growth boundaries to use less territory for more people.
- Watershed management.

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