



2009 State Water Plan Update Public Outreach

Region: Northwest New Mexico
University of New Mexico – Gallup Campus
Gallup, NM
April 27, 2009

Summary of Discussion

Facilitator/Recorder: Seth Cohen

Welcome and Introductions

Angela Bordegaray, State Water Planner with the Interstate Stream Commission, welcomed the group of 20 to this public forum held by the Office of the State Engineer and the Interstate Stream Commission (OSE/ISC). She introduced agency staff:

Wayne Canon and Elizabeth Cervantes of the OSE District I Office (Albuquerque)
Karin Stangl, Planning and Communications Director
Tanya Trujillo, ISC General Counsel
Myron Armijo, Native American Water Liaison
John Leeper and Michael Benson of the Navajo Nation Water Resources Department

Presentation

Bordegaray presented an overview of the state water planning process to date, including data on population, water supplies and demands, and highlights from the Northwest New Mexico Regional Water Plan. Cibola County and the portion of McKinley County that does not drain to the San Juan River Basin define the Northwest region geographically. The Northwest Regional Water Plan was accepted by the ISC in 2004. The plan is available on this agency's website at: http://www.ose.state.nm.us/isc_regional_plans6.html

Questions and Comments on Presentation

Following the presentation, the public had the opportunity to comment and ask questions about the presentation or other related issues. Seth Cohen, facilitator, introduced himself and explained that he was contracted by the agency to help facilitate some of the state water plan review meetings.

Population growth and Water Supply

Question: Several people expressed concern about current and future population growth in the state and region and the expected demand on water supply. One person wanted to know how the state arrived at the figures for the increased growth and water use in the Northwest

Region (from an estimated population of 90,000 in 2000 to a projected 105,000 in 2040, an increase of 15,000 people).

Answer: Bordegaray explained that the state demographer (the University of New Mexico's Bureau of Business and Economic Research – BBER) bases population projections on historical trends, using death, birth, in-migration, and out-migration rates. Demographers base future population on these vital and migration events. [The full report, "A Report on Historical and Future Population Dynamics in New Mexico Water Planning Regions" is located on the OSE website at:

<http://www.ose.state.nm.us/PDF/Publications/TechnicalReports/BBER-WPR-Estimates-Projections-Aug2008.pdf>.]

For water use, the Office of the State Engineer calculates statewide water uses by county and by river basin in its "New Mexico Water Use by Categories" Report. [Note: Reports on water uses from 1990 to 2005 are on the agency website at:

http://www.ose.state.nm.us/publications_technical_reports_wateruse.html.

Generally speaking, the water planning regions put the two data sets together – their region's population data and the water uses by category for their counties or portions of counties that are in their regions.

The Northwest Region projected its population by multiplying the current population by an annual rate of growth. The Northwest Region then estimated *public water* demand by multiplying water system population by weighted average per capita use rates for Cibola and McKinley Counties. *Domestic demand* was calculated by multiplying the self-supplied population by the Office of the State Engineer rate of 70 gallons per capita per day. Future water demand for all other water uses was projected at the 1995 water withdrawal levels, the source for which was the New Mexico Water Use by Categories, 2005 Report from the Office of the State Engineer. The region calculated its regional population projection using the state demographer's data and estimating water projections collected by the Office of the State Engineer, and regional population estimates were plugged in to derive approximate water supply and demand.

Question: Another person asked for the current supply and gap in the Northwest Region and how the data was derived. He was concerned about the huge gap (increase) in projected water use in comparison to the expected population increase.

Answer: A City of Gallup employee and member of the Northwest Regional Water Planning group explained that a straight-line analysis was used, based on historic domestic trends and current use, but without factoring in conservation strategies. He did not have figures on hand for the current gap between water supply and demand.

Review of old water contracts

Question: A concerned citizen asked about the age of contracts for lakes, such as Bluewater, and inquired as to when these contracts were last reviewed or amended. He was concerned about the loss of supply from these sources due to water being taken by those with rights for irrigation and then selling the water for other commercial or mining uses. Another individual expressed concern about future water use for proposed uranium mines.

Answer: OSE staff explained that the Office of the State Engineer recognizes the rights of individuals to legally take water from the lakes. The contracts date from a 1948 process of adjudication and are not currently under review by the State of New Mexico. He added that some people have exercised their right to sell their water.

Federal government involvement

Question: An audience member asked about the level of federal government involvement in water issues for the region and the state.

Answer: A member of the Northwest Regional Planning group and of the Navajo Nation responded that the federal government is involved only in particular areas of the state with regard to water issues, such as when they are a party to adjudications. Someone clarified that the federal government has to file applications for water rights, like all parties.

How the State and regional water plans are used

Question: A participant asked what a “regional water plan” is and how is it used.

Answer: Staff explained that the plan is put together on the local level and provides information about the region’s current and projected future water uses and water supplies and provides alternatives for meeting future demand. The State Water Plan calls for integration of the regional water plans into a comprehensive statewide plan. The ISC is taking the first step in beginning to integrate the 16 regional water plans into the State Water Plan with these statewide regional meetings. Implementation occurs on the local level.

Rural users in Northwest Region

Comment: An individual from Whispering Cedars said rural and individual users are largely left out of the decision-making process for water planning in the region. He feels individual users do not have adequate channels for representation. He noted that the County and the City of Gallup are the two major players in the Northwest Regional Water Plan and that the Northwest Council of Governments (NWCOG) has had the difficult task of facilitating the different interests of stakeholders.

Comment: A man from the County Water Board challenged the claim that rural, individual users have not been represented. He said these individuals have been heard in several venues and that their complaints continue despite having been addressed.

Recharge rates

Question: An individual asked if recharge rates are available for the Northwest Region.

Answer: Staff and other participants explained that several aquifers are drawn from in the region and that the majority of the deeper aquifers have “negligible” recharge. Surface water is also intermittent at best.

Question: Someone asked if there is any data since Escalante in the 1970s and 1980s.

Answer: A regional plan member responded that there is by hydrologist (Shoemaker), but it depends on which aquifer.

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?***

- Growing population concern: A participant stated that the state needs to focus more on the problem of population growth rather than just how to deal with water issues once the population has increased. He cited United Nation figures about how the U.S. population has tripled in the past century and how it is expected to continue increasing.
- Limited space for commercial development: A participant stated that commercial development space should be developed with water and land concerns carefully in mind.
- Rio Grande corridor: A person encouraged the state to ensure smart growth along the Rio Grande corridor where development has the potential to increase significantly.
- Expertise and assistance with complete recycling and recharge: An individual asked the state to assist the region with processes that can re-use and re-charge water supplies, such as water for golf courses and other recreational uses. An employee from the City of Gallup said Gallup is currently using effluent for golf courses and that the city is making progress with other recycling uses.
- Whispering Cedars (near Continental Divide) re-charge concerns: One man referred to a “G-22 Plan” that will draw a lot of water from the Whispering Cedar aquifer with no recharge. Another woman wanted the state to know there are 120 households in the Whispering Cedar area and another 70-plus families in Continental Divide and that many people from these areas feel the government has not contacted them regarding water issues/concerns. She said there are planned developments and expected growth in both communities. Another individual noted that individuals need greater access to the state for providing input on water issues.

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?*

- Brackish water recovery: A participant described brackish water recovery processes in Texas and suggested such practices be researched and considered here.
- Power plants: A participant stated power plants should be encouraged, or regulated, to use less water.
- Metering: A participant stated that cities and other populated areas should have active management through water system metering. In Gallup, metering has had the effect of cutting consumption by 38% in the past.
- Install and use efficient toilets: A participant noted that there is great loss due to inefficient and poorly constructed toilet systems.
- State involvement in regional land-use planning: A participant requested that the state have authority over how and where regions

develop new sub-divisions in order to assure adequate water supply, stating that development tends to occur where there has been previous development and it is not always logical or sustainable for water usage.

- Agricultural water consumption: A participant said agricultural users should be encouraged to reduce usage by whichever entity has jurisdiction for the given agricultural area.
- Smarter home development: A participant who cited examples from El Paso, Texas said refrigerated air needs to be considered as a potentially more efficient means for cooling homes. He also noted solar homes and encouraged possible tax-incentives for such water conservation methods in home development.

3) Have you observed climate variability in your region? What should be done to prepare for these extreme circumstances in your region and the state as a whole?

- Flooding: Extreme flooding on the Rio Puerco in the past year caused severe damage to highways and commercial plants, resulting in financial losses and making it difficult for reservation families to get to their homes. Participants expressed interest in finding means for how such run-off and flooding might be captured.
- Deforestation/erosion: An individual noted that new developments are leading to deforestation and erosion and said it needs to be addressed. He asked who is addressing such concerns.
- Capturing water: Participants asked how the state could help water users capture water with small dams and ponds, etc. OSE agency personnel explained that the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) is the appropriate contact, to get information about the local soil and water conservation district. Staff from the OSE District I Office said that individual users need a permit from Office of the State Engineer for these projects because such projects can affect other nearby users. Rainwater harvesting is a separate issue and is encouraged. A permit is not needed for harvesting water off rooftops. A participant asked for more educational outreach on these issues, as there is misunderstanding about the laws related to run-off and dams.
- Long-term analysis of climate change needed: A participant stated that a 10-year analysis of climate change, for example, is too small to estimate real changes in climate.
- Warmer winters: one participant noted that winters were warmer 50 years ago.

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

- **Funding for outdated water systems:** A participant explained that the whole water system in Church Rock is contaminated and needs to be replaced. He asked if the state has funding for this type of project. Michael Benson said it is part of the Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project and that there is some funding allocated for this type of update. John Leeper of the Navajo Nation explained that the project is “shovel-ready” but recovery dollars are needed. An individual speaking about the GAMERCO (north of Gallup) Water and Sanitation District stated that funding is greatly needed for 60 year-old infrastructures. Problems that occur are big and costly. He said it is impossible to pay repair bills and expenses.
- **Drinking water:** An individual noted that 20 to 30 percent of Navajo families do not have drinking water. The cost is too high to extend pipes.
- **Regionalization:** Participants discussed the need for greater unity of water system areas. A resident of Whispering Cedars responded by stating that their community has many projects and that regionalization would not help them. Another man challenged this view and explained the benefits to all of collaboration between rural and municipal areas.
- **Point-of-use systems:** A participant noted that there are many individual wells in the Northwest region and that the Office of the State Engineer could help homeowners learn about the benefit of point-of-use systems by broadcasting this information to the public.
- **Petrol-chemical clean up:** A participant said water usage for petrol-chemical production produces a lot of wastewater but companies do not have the resources for adequate clean up for re-use and recycling. State involvement is needed.

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