



**Comments from New Mexico State Water Plan Public Meeting;
Acoma Pueblo
Tribal Auditorium
Thursday, August 28, 2003; 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**

The public meeting in Acoma was the 23rd 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 welcomed approximately 12 people who attended the public meeting from Acoma Pueblo, Grants and other surrounding 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.

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 sources

Stewardship:

- It seems that this area sold its soul to the mines; the mining came and was short lived but ruined communities that have been here for centuries; the water tables went down drastically; Milan and Grants used to be the carrot capital of the world; I don't think that this area has ever recovered completely; we can't do this again! Money speaks but is it really for the long haul? We need to make sure that we look at the long-term effect
- We are experiencing a drought and we are just not getting the recharge that we used to; it is happening, but it is limited; measurements need to be taken so that we know what the quantity of our water is; we need to be careful where we allocate the water we do have
- Relationships – we are trying to grab onto the water and there is fear that people are going to start to take the water from each other; there is a lot of competition between Grants, Acoma and San Fidel; this might be one reason that there are so few people at this meeting – we are afraid to talk about water together; we need to make sure that we do not fight folks but rather share our water; there is defensiveness and stewardship needs to be the key
- There is a good example of tribal government participation in a regional water plan; the Jemez y Sangre plan has taken into consideration the pueblos needs in an attempt to respect the sovereignty of the pueblos; the Pueblos in that region participated as observers in the water planning process; they signed an MOU with the non-Indian interests that were heading the planning effort; that MOU acknowledged certain Pueblo rights, including the confidentiality of information, the sanctity of tribal sovereignty and the need to not be bound by the plan, the recognition that state processes do not apply on tribal land, and the authority of Pueblos over regulation of water on pueblo land; the planning process that occurred in Jemez y Sangre should be followed here in the state planning process, since it resulted in a successful relationship
- We need to find ways to overcome fear and get everyone talking; one on one, how can we get people to communicate better?
- Where there is fear, there is grabbing – the principle “To hell with everyone else I am going to grab mine” should not be followed
- Taking care of the water that we have is of utmost importance; technology is a way that can be used but it is really expensive
- Pueblo of Acoma just produced a video with EPA to show how people can work together; it shows collaboration from other tribes and the State Engineer Office to take care of the resource; we have little water and too many users, and we need to care for the resource that we have; the resource is lifeblood...everyone needs it to survive

Balancing Supply and Demand:

- We like that the State Engineer is requiring developers to prove that they can provide a 40-year supply of water for new developments; but are the developers using good data, and is the Office of the State Engineer insuring that the water is really there? We need to make sure that the developers prove the real numbers and not affect other communities that have been using this water before them; needs to be good accurate data
- The key to balancing supply and demand is watershed health; once we have our watersheds healthy, then we can really understand the quantity of water that they can produce; we need to educate and get funding to prove that watershed health can improve quantity and quality of our water resource; it will take technology and money, but it is a way to maximize our water resources
- We have plenty of growth in New Mexico due to births; yet we always want to bring more businesses that build our population; this brings a great need for more water just because we need a quick buck; we need to be caretakers of the population we have already; do we want to be a Denver or a Phoenix? We don't have the water but we act like we do; we are already out of balance
- The developer comes in and says that he has a 40-year supply; this is a paper right; the difference between real wet water and paper rights is great; you can't produce wet water on the basis of paper rights alone; there can be significant impact on areas where the water is not available but is taken out because the paper rights were there; we need to accept that we can no longer give paper water without tying it to real wet water rights
- The communities in New Mexico need to consider the type of industry and what the influence will be on the community's water supply; we need to take this into consideration before bringing industries into our communities
- The Prewitt power plant that we have will never allow the aquifers here to recharge. God bless power but where is the balance? The power company went to the ranchers to get the water rights. The ranchers had the water on paper but may have not always had full rights available. This is an example of paper vs. wet water rights. The rancher may have continued to use water even after selling it to the company.
- If communities do not have the water, they cannot grow in a healthy way; look at Santa Fe and Albuquerque

Drought:

- We need to seriously conserve the resource, and reuse it where possible

- We can look at new technologies, but don't forget the very old technologies; such as heavy mulch as practiced by farmers for centuries; modern agribusiness may not find it easy to work with heavy mulch, but Acoma has been here for at least more than 1,000 years; and they maintained themselves through serious drought years by effective conservation of water.
- This drought we have should be the marker for what is available; wet years can recharge the aquifer; but this is the marker for the development and industry and farming that we can have; this supply should be used in state planning; we can't go any further than what we have now; any extra moisture can replenish us for future droughts
- Drought doesn't happen suddenly; people are in denial for a couple of years; it requires a lot of education, and if we are going to succeed in what decisions are made, we can't fail in our education
- When I first asked the elders about conservation of water resources, the first thing they said was "we prayed like heck, and we danced like heck;" water is a lifeline and that's what we do; that's what the elders tell me, you can't do anything about it and we have no control; it's in someone else's hands, so we pray like heck and dance like heck, and now we have rain (it is raining outside as this meeting is ongoing); that is a kind of education, too; we need to go back to the basics
- During drought, or we should say a more normal weather pattern like now, there are things that we can physically do to lessen the impact; native peoples have crops that are healthier to eat and use ½ to a third less water than hybrids, such as Hopi corn and melons and squash; dipping of water for firefighting drained Snow Lake in the Gila completely two years ago; we need to use drought tolerant species; we also need to thin our watersheds to reduce fire danger and increase run off.
- Let's remember as a State to not try to be something we aren't; such as lawns in Albuquerque and growing non-drought tolerant species; what's our mission statement as a State regarding our water use, our identity?
- I got acquainted with a gentlemen from Israel using drip systems with pipelines; began over 20 years ago, and growing all kinds of food way out in the middle of the desert; it looks like a mirage
- Drip systems in New Mexico tend to clog up easily
- It's sulfuric acid or just vinegar, which neutralizes the alkaline and brings down the soil pH, especially if it is well water to be pumped into drip systems; but that same alkaline well water destroys the soil even without a drip system
- In Albuquerque a comment was made that a pueblo outlawed lawns, and I haven't heard that from other pueblos; as a society lawns are no longer regarded as a

luxury item, but in a drought, such should be applied; if that were the law, would people be less willing to come and live here?

- Look at both conservation and reuse to recharge the aquifers and prepare for drought; look at current technology; a good example is salt cedar eradication going on at Pueblo of Santa Ana; here at Acoma we have an experimental plot reusing wastewater to replant and rehab a watershed area, and also recharge the aquifer; it is a system that we borrowed from the Pacific Northwest; we have just finished six miles of salt cedar eradication on the Rio San Jose; right now our salt cedar eradication has reached the western boundary of Laguna, and we are going back the other way; we need to look at how we can best conserve what is available; we have always lived with drought by using conservation and drought tolerant crops; our neighbors to the west use 280 to 290 gallons per day; here we use 70 to 80 gallons per day because we live with an aging infrastructure, and because we conserve as a tradition
- In 1983 Judge Meechem said that people who drilled wells could only have them for indoor use; do you know how many homes have indoor swimming pools now? Subsequently the law was changed to limit the use per person, but this shows us unanticipated consequences of what we do.

Water Administration:

- We at Acoma don't allow vehicle washing or backyard vegetable plots during the drought; through our housing program we assess all of the homes in the area for leaky faucets or other pipes, and provide assistance to those who can't afford to fix the leaks; it was surprising what we found, especially in the homes of the elderly
- Laguna has a water ordinance that doesn't allow watering lawns, washing cars, and we have a system for fining violators.
- Would like to see the state government limit developers when demand is more than supply, and not let them rely on the use of paper water rights
- In the Rio San Jose basin, if the State wants to look at administration, then they need to look at what water rights are existing; after the mines bought up water rights, those that were sold continue to be used by the people who sold them; it's something that Acoma has been telling the State for a number of years; the State needs to do a complete inventory of wet water resources
- Define better development and farming technologies; use crops made for the state's dry climate; it seems that we are desperate for development in order to have more of a tax base to pay the bills; and we need more jobs, and we need more industry, all at the expense of water resources; it is also stripping the resources that we have already; we need to keep "feeding this animal" but it is robbing us of our water

Funding:

- Need to have the state help pay to help farmers with conservation measures; not just the federal government; buried drip is \$1800/acre; therefore the same \$3.33/bushel price of wheat isn't going to cut it, even though the yield is substantially improved; in State of Missouri there is a 1/8 of a cent sales tax earmarked for natural resources that brings in \$38 million per year; but here people would not vote even for 1/8 of a cent.
- The produce is the same as it was in the 70's yet the tools are much more expensive. We need to see help from the state to assist in funding.
- Its just not feasible to get farmers to use drip, they aren't making money, they are just barely breaking even; there needs to be funding to help the farmer do significant conservation
- Funding for watershed health, leaky infrastructure, agriculture conservation – it's never ending, so start at the top and go down, by funding watershed health first, you can't start at the bottom and work up with funding
- We need to hang on to agriculture, because those crops are healthy; we shouldn't pay farmers not to plant
- For the big outfits, the more water they use, the cheaper the rates; we shouldn't allow it to be cheaper to buy more water
- It should be just the opposite
- I'd like to see the state put more money into institutions to do more research on technology for conservation and reuse of water
- If we are going to get development; then make it pay a special tax just for water, because development taxes the water resource more; and the tax could fund water projects; why can't there be a tax put on groceries just to give farmers some funding for the technology they need, because the farmers don't make money; but we just repealed the grocery tax
- The developer will say that I have just as much right as a farmer to make a livelihood from water, because of New Mexico's water law
- The developer has access to capital that the farmer doesn't; when people are buying a house the costs are hidden, and the builder can increase the price if he has to; but at the farmers' market they haggle over the price of each piece of food

- Agriculture is a renewable way of making of a living, and a lot of the others are not; which is a difference from how the developers make money; there are equity issues here
- Our law doesn't say there is any difference in value for how our water is used, and that works to your benefit and to your detriment; in Arizona they say farmers abuse water, but in New Mexico they cannot do that under our water law