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Comments
Of
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Water is an ever-important issue that controls the future of NM. Daily there are articles in the newspaper or on the TV. Water issues are not just local to New Mexico. People throughout the world are recognizing the value of water. Wars are being fought in the Middle East. Water is the base of confrontations between Syria and Israel. The New York Times carried an article on its front page three weeks ago saying that water in Texas has replaced oil as the new liquid gold.

The recent 2000 census confirmed that the State of New Mexico is growing. As the State grows and water becomes more and more scarce, water will ultimately define the future of New Mexico. Because of this growth, waters by necessity will have to become actively managed.

There is one thing many people forget. New Mexico is basically a desert. There are finite waters available for people to use. Not everyone can have all the water they want. This basic principal was recognized 400 years ago when the Spanish government settled New Mexico. This is why the State Constitution set up a unique way of administering water. A priority system was established. The priority system is based on the time that the waters were first put to beneficial use. People that have senior water rights get the water in a time of drought. Junior appropriators get cut off.

It is easy to say that New Mexico is a desert. But what does this mean? Many people have the simple idea that all one has to do to get water is to hire a well driller, drill a well, drop a pump, flip the switch, and water magically appears at the end of the pipe. But there is a lot more to getting that water into the pipe than just flipping a switch. The tour over the next 3

days has been designed to explain where New Mexico gets its water. The people at the New Mexico Bureau of Mines and Mineral Resources as well as many others, including people from my office, have put many long hard hours into planning this tour.

The water supply of the state is complex. Yes, water can be acquired by drilling a well. Much of this pumped water sits in underground storage reservoirs laid down by Mother Nature hundreds, perhaps even thousands of years ago. It is difficult at best to map these reservoirs, but we do know that these reservoirs do have defined boundaries—they are not limitless. These reservoirs are sometimes easy to tap into—sometimes they are difficult. It has to do with the ground below the surface-- what is called the subsurface geology. Water can easily flow through sand. But water flow can be hindered or stopped entirely if it runs into a layer of clay.

Water in New Mexico doesn't just come from wells. Water can also be acquired by taking water from New Mexico's rivers. The state's rivers are not large. In fifteen minutes, more water flows down the Columbia River in Oregon than flows in the entire state of New Mexico in a year. The majority of the State's river water is located in the northwest part of the state. More than half of the state's surface waters run in the Animas and San Juan Rivers.

Because there is such a large amount of water in these Northwest rivers, many decades ago, the state supported the concept to bring these waters from the San Juan Basin into the Rio Grande basin. Subsequently, a tunnel was constructed to bring San Juan River water under the Continental Divide near Dulce NM -- finally dumping these waters into the Chama River below Tierra Amarilla. Running down the Chama River, these waters ultimately flow into the Rio Grande, bringing an imported water supply to municipal and agricultural users up and down the Rio Grande. This transbasin water is called San-Juan Chama water.

Much of this San Juan Chama water is intended for current and future needs by the City of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Both cities are currently in the process of evaluating ways to begin diverting this water from the Rio Grande. Both communities need to immediately do so to prevent serious problems that will occur if either city continues its current reliance on deep wells.

It would be nice if I could approve every well application that is submitted to my office. But unfortunately, this is not possible. When one pumps a well, the pumping can hurt other surface and ground water right holders. As an example, on Thursday you will visit the Buckman well field. This well field pumps a high volume of water for Santa Fe. But people that hold water rights on acequias along the Rio Grande, the Tesuque and Pojoaque Rivers are going to see their water supplies gradually diminish because of pumping of the Buckman Well Field.

This is because there is an interconnection between the State's surface and ground waters. When a well is located in a basin that is hydraulically connected to a river, every gallon of water pumped out of a well will ultimately cause one less gallon of water to flow down some river.

Dams have been constructed on our rivers for hundreds of years. They are designed to capture early spring runoff and release it during hot summer months when water demand is high for irrigation of fields, watering of lawns, or washing cars.

Laws can sometimes prevent full use of waters behind a reservoir. During the tour, you will visit McClure Reservoir. This dam was constructed after 1929 and therefore is under the jurisdiction of the Rio Grande Compact. Water can be stored behind this dam as long as Elephant Butte Reservoir, located south of Socorro, is full of water. If the water level in Elephant Butte drops below a certain point, Texas can place a call on the majority of the water stored behind McClure. This means that the stored water can not be used by the City of Santa Fe, but will rather have to left in the Santa Fe River so that can be used instead by farmers in Southern New Mexico and farmers in Texas below El Paso. A compact call by Texas is not a hypothetical situation. Elephant Butte has run low and Texas has made the call for these post 1929 reservoir waters to be released.

Other dams in the State are designed to capture floodwater. Generally these waters are held for only a short period of time, and then gradually released. Cochiti is such a flood storage reservoir.

Dams in Northern New Mexico have recently acquired a new role. We face very serious endangered species issues on the Rio Grande. Three weeks ago, at a special Rio Grande Compact Commission meeting, storage of early snowmelt runoff was approved for storage behind Jemez and Abiquiu dams. This water will be released later in the year for the silvery minnow, an endangered fish that lives in the Rio Grande.

I have just mentioned the Rio Grande compact and the Rio Grande Compact Commission. Federal and state laws called Interstate River Compacts govern the waters of many of the State's rivers. These compacts heavily influence the management of the State's waters. New Mexico has been having water wars with its neighboring states since before statehood. These wars finally led to the signing of nine different compacts with Texas, Colorado, Arizona and other western states. The compacts govern flow in NM rivers that cross state boundaries. It would be great if New Mexico could keep all the water in its rivers to use for its citizens, but this is simply not possible. A major portion of the water that flows in the states rivers must be delivered to downstream states.

And what would happen if we don't make our delivery obligations? We have already learned our lesson on this issue. The State has spent to date close to \$50 million remedying Pecos River under deliveries. If the State is unable to provide for the future administration of its waters, ultimately the cost to the State taxpayers could be in the hundreds of millions, perhaps hundreds of billions of dollars—though fines, acquisition of water rights, and lost economy.

Watersheds are important to the health of a river. The management of watersheds is an evolving science. For many decades, it was thought that the smallest fire in a forest needed to immediately extinguished. These policies, while well intentioned, have contributed to the decline of yield of water from a watershed. Further, these fire suppression policies have created an environment that can cause devastating consequences should a fire occur by either a lightning strike or a tossed out cigarette.

New Mexico water supplies are finite. Water planning is essential. There is one common thread among all water users that I have noticed over the past six years. Everyone wants the maximum amount of water they can get. Unfortunately, there is not enough water to give everyone what they want. What one person gets is at the expense of another. There is no free water available.

Long term water planning is essential. NM cities and counties are growing. As more and more people populate the state, more water is going to be demanded.

Where is this water going to come from? Agriculture consumes the majority of water in the State. Most Cities and Counties throughout the state want development to occur. The only source of water for future development is from agricultural lands. Because this is an arid state, and there is a finite amount of water, outside of San Juan Chama water, about the only source of water for development is from agriculture. Yet there is considerable debate that is occurring at the state and regional levels to preserve agricultural lands. This debate is sure to intensify over the years. Growth cannot occur simultaneously without making hard decisions on where the water for growth is going to have to come. Water planning can be used as a tool to identify trends in a region's water demand, and then identify sources of water to meet those needs. Water planning has the opportunity to bring municipal and agricultural stakeholders to the table to discuss ways how each other's demands and needs can be met.

Indian pueblos and tribes and acequias form some of the state's earliest cultural values. The water values these cultures hold are reasons why New Mexico has such a rich and diversified heritage. Regional water planning can help to identify these values and define how growth can occur while preserving NM's unique cultures.

Water use in the State was developed not only by the acequias and Indian use; irrigation and conservancy districts also developed its use. You are going to visit the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District that was set up by the State Legislature in 1929. This district, like all other similar districts throughout the state, is set by state law and has independent taxing authority. One irrigation district in the Southern part of the state has recently filed a suit in a state court stating that they are independent of state water law.

In addition to water quantity, the quality of water is an important issue. Natural and man-made activities are adding pollutants to rivers. The amount of these pollutants is measured by what are called TMDL's. TMDL's are set by the New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission and are designed to protect the quality of the State's surface waters.

As the state continues to grow, the waters of the state are going to have to become more actively managed. This will have to be done by creating a balance among large groups of people, based on geology, the State's constitution and existing law.

Because of the complexity of the Geology of the State and existing local, state and Federal laws, decision makers everywhere that deal with water issues are going to face difficult challenges in the upcoming years. I feel confident that this tour will give everyone a unique perspective of some of the State's water issues.

I thank you all for coming tonight.