



**Comments from New Mexico State Water Plan Public Meeting;  
Pueblo of Isleta  
Old Palace Casino  
Exit 215 at Interstate 25  
Monday, September 8, 2003; 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**

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The public meeting at Isleta was the 27<sup>th</sup> 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 16 people who attended the public meeting from the Pueblo of Isleta 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

### **Stewardship:**

- Stewardship through the Six Middle Rio Grande Pueblos' planning coalition
- Need policies at state level that address more than where we move the drops of water around; such as (1) need to value our water – should be the policy of the State to value, recognize and preserve water as a life sustaining resource; (2) think water first, by considering water quantity and quality in decision-making; (3) preserve New Mexico's character and culture, such as ranching and acequias; (4) protect our future, by ensuring wet water retirements to allow growth elsewhere
- The State needs to recognize the pueblos prior and paramount rights to water; agricultural, cultural and traditional values; pueblos have a sacred right and obligation to protect water for those purposes; recognize that government-to-government consultation is necessary because a lot of the water is not quantified, and discussions to do hydrographic surveys must recognize this; State Engineer continually allows permits for ground water pumping that affect the river, and the river is suffering due to endangered species; before any decisions can be made, the pueblos' prior and paramount rights need to be recognized
- One other thing is that six middle Rio Grande pueblos do have storage rights in El Vado for prior and paramount rights; and in conditions of drought, when a release is requested, sometimes the water gets to Isleta, and sometimes it does not; the Bureau of Reclamation also has a trust responsibility to protect that water; right now that water is not part of the Rio Grande Compact; now that water is being put into the river to provide water for the minnow, and that needs to be recognized; also the pueblos tend to develop water for their own interests, as well for agricultural uses; need to recognize pueblos' contribution to the life of the river
- The federal government and the state of New Mexico need to recognize the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the protections it gives to water
- Education and the importance of conservation, for younger folks and for older ones, too; we don't do enough to be efficient in all kinds of water uses

### **Balancing Supply and Demand:**

- Increase the supply; we lose an awful lot of precipitation to evapotranspiration; there is a real component of watershed restoration that isn't just fire protection; if more water could permeate into our watersheds instead of running off to arroyos, from thinning of forest cover; assuming certain levels of forest reduction and evaporation reduction, a study in Colorado found considerable savings of water in

the watersheds, and it wasn't clear-cutting by any means; granted it's just a model, but we need to fund this for New Mexico's watersheds

- In that same vein, you could throw up there, taking out salt cedar and Russian olive trees
- Bosque restoration, and storage of water upstream instead of "laying it out to dry" by storing it in Elephant Butte reservoir; start treating water as if it is really worth something – stop irrigating sidewalks; we have found that there is no single silver bullet; everyone has to change, especially in outdoor uses – that's where it dries up and goes away
- I don't know how to increase the supply, because when I eat chocolates in a box, and I keep eating them, then there aren't any more chocolates in the box – that is what it is coming to; when I have gone to the Office of the State Engineer, there are too many water rights for the amount of water that exists; people are creating water with water rights, but there is only a certain volume that is there, and that is what we have to protect; I've had a lot of experience, especially with the mines around Laguna Pueblo, where water rights weren't there, but later the paperwork appeared, and then the water rights were there; people are paying big bucks and working their way into the Office of the State Engineer, demanding their water rights – better management so that senior water right holders don't have to worry about water being there for them; I can do all of the conservation, but the paperwork may take my water rights away; it's going to come to having to protect water rights that are Spanish, as well as pueblo rights; business brings jobs but we have to make sure that the senior rights are honored and taken care of
- I think that supply is less than demand; so maybe treat brackish water for potable water, but it often has to be transported a long distance; why not treat your wastewater where you are, and then lessen the supply needed through recycling; that's the reality that I think that we need to live up to; that's the technology that is needed to balance supply with demand; we have to accept recycling of our water; it takes a psychological change and will make the water go further, if not increasing the actual supply
- Make sure that growth, before it is allowed to take place, has a sustainable supply to go with it; prove up the supply
- That all goes into pricing, and the cost of getting water purified, moved, or whatever else; we are used to paying almost nothing for water, and we may have to change how we think about; for the City of Albuquerque, the rates are something like \$0.01 or \$0.02 per gallon; if it were \$1.39 per gallon, things would change
- It is at the point where only the richest get to afford water
- That is what I was speaking about at the State Engineer's office, rich people are coming in and buying up water rights and taking them away when we are asleep, even though we have been there with our water rights for a long time
- The horizon of water planning is only 40 years, and we could get back in this same situation, we don't treat balancing supply and demand on a sustainable basis
- What good is having demand exceed supply, if the water quality isn't up to par? Some of the water being put into the river south of Albuquerque doesn't support

- the water life and plant life; if something isn't done on the water quality issue, it isn't going to do us to have any water in the river if the quality isn't good
- Albuquerque is one of the few cities in the country without a combined sewer overflow (CSO system); when it is raining like now, the fecal coliform goes way up, because the runoff flows into cement arroyos that go right into the river without any sewage treatment; the solution would have to be to re-engineer the entire system, or for the people not to put out stuff that causes the water quality runoff problem; you don't think about what you are sending down to your neighbor when you take your dog for a walk; need to have a conscious about it because the solution is too expensive; City of Albuquerque needs to try to get compliance as best they can by trying voluntary efforts; where's the leadership to tell people how not to eat the entire box of chocolates? The Western Water Policy Commission said that we will only start conserving when the price of water gets high enough – I think that means farmers and communities going under, because it creates markets that Adam Smith never envisioned; in the old days it was considered bad business if you sent pollution down to your neighbor
  - We have several releases by Albuquerque of sewage, and when we found out, it was too late to tell our farmers not to irrigate; our traditional crops don't have as long a lifespan of production, because of the water quality from what people put in the river; we have had experiences with sewage released into the river, and we hope and pray that it doesn't continue, but if population grows, they are likely to continue to occur, and that is the condition that we are facing due to development such as Mesa del Sol, and runoff from development on the West Side; everything that is natural is being compounded by oils and stuff on the streets

### **Drought:**

- Cloud seeding is trying to take on the power of the power Himself. We should not disrupt nature. I don't know how this thing happened, but it is dangerous. Mess with nature and you may have more severe consequences and I don't want to know what the consequences.
- Information is just not getting out to the farmer about the severity of drought. Data is needed.
- One of the things that people fail to realize about drought is that once its here its too late. We need pre-planning for drought. There is very little money available for supporting this pre-planning.
- One of the things that we are doing with the regional process is balancing our supply with the demand. We are currently out of balance. We have a substantial over draft now but we want to use the aquifer as the danger drought plan. When we are not in drought we can inject the water to make it come back.
- Drought starts with a D and D is dead end. Its too late. I have gone to SF and sat in meetings all day and there is little to know knowledge of what is going on with drought. We have to find a way that works and leave it. Lets not expand what we come up with. Leaders lack the desire to talk with each other. There is no getting together to talk with each other from various state agencies. We spend too much

time talking and not enough time coming up with solutions. The little people often get ignored...this is not right.

### **Administration:**

- I think that one of the first things that we have to do is to understand our water. Credible measurement of water and water use should be done. We should promote the establishment of water budgets within all areas in New Mexico. Maintain the wet water within our state. Enforce our rules. We should share water shortfalls. Settle our claims. Provide incentives to solve federal, state, local water rights. Preserve our rights. There is a community interest in the transfer of water from point a to point b.
- There is way too many illegal wells in new Mexico. The selling of water rights and the continual use of the water that has been sold.
- Water administration takes on a lot of meanings. There should be more local control than the regional and state scale. No one understands their water and the complexities of the system better than the individuals in the local areas.
- Local people need to make the people in Santa Fe aware of the rules that are out there. Enforcement needs to happen. Those that have the senior water right should have the ability to use them. For instance the land grant, when our children turn 18 they get land and a water right to start a family. We want SF to understand that these laws of ours exist before the laws of NM. We need to make sure that the water stays with the land even if the land is sold.
- It is getting better with the new elected officials. There is an effort to communicate with between the agencies. Concentration of efforts is occurring not much more than it did in the past. It will take time to get going but it is in the right direction.
- The federal government has the interest to protect Indian water rights. The state needs to recognize this. The federal government needs to be here to protect these rights. We have lost a lot and we cannot lose anymore. The future of our water rights needs to include both the state and the federal government. Consultation of the federal government needs to occur before adjudication can occur.

### **Funding:**

- Funding is incredibly important. In ABQ the topic of funding went really quickly. It is something that we should spend some time with. It takes a lot of money to get plans going. We usually plan for money once the plan is over. We need to look ahead of this plan completion to make sure that we have the money. A lot of funding is getting cut around the state. Funding is the responsibility of our leaders. Congress needs to provide more money for the purpose of funding local efforts. We are lucky to get programs funding let alone increase or add new programs. The SWP may be a great plan but without the funding there is no plan implementation.
- The federal government could provide more to our water efforts. If we just raised our water cost by just a few more cents, there would be a great amount of money available to leverage the federal monies that may become available

- We need to prioritize our priorities. We spend a lot of federal money to make sure that we have cheap gasoline. If we spent just a small amount of the gas funding on water we would be eons ahead with water planning. Gasoline is not the only thing. We all are choosing to pay for gas rather than water.
- When we look at the state governors proposal to get the water plan together, that he also looks at funding priorities. Indian tribes need to be dealt with at a government to government interaction. If we are going to make this work, we need to make sure that we work together to see the funding get split up properly. We have a lot to teach about efficiency and methods of conservation water management. We have computer modeling and hydrologic tests. We do not live by thinking about drought as being the end all. We have funding usually from the federal government and we don't as much anymore. Governor needs to assist us in getting the federal monies.
- NM is one of two states that is not operating on a deficit. What do we want? 400\$ going towards the pocket or seeing clean dependable water supplies.
- I think that there have been some supply and demand issues that the new developers need to pay for the infrastructure that they put in. It is not longer us that should pay for this. The water needs to come with the development. No development should be allowed that does not provide for the water that is available. The maintenance and infrastructure needs are going to cost a lot to upkeep. How are we going to maintain and enhance our water utility infrastructure in the future?
- The Indians signed treaties that said that the federal government was going to pay for a lot of things. This did not happen. We need to make sure that water is not lost.
- Within the years the small rural area mines are coming in and give money for community but we are loosing the money. The state lets them get away with taking the money. The DOE gets the money and even though it is said that it is earmarked for the community, it takes an act of congress to get the money to the community. This does not always happen and rarely happens to the amount that it is said to be in the first place.
- Catastrophic events could cause the water of our state to become polluted due to The military has a huge impact on our water futures and there are huge risks to our future. The state water plan should look at these potential for these type of dangers