2009 State Water Plan Update Public Outreach

Region: Middle Rio Grande
Bernalillo Town Council Chambers
Bernalillo, NM
April 21, 2009

Summary of Discussion
Facilitator/Recorder: Lucy Moore

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

Rolf Schmidt-Peterson, ISC, Rio Grande Basin Manager
Amy Haas, Legal Counsel (contracted)
Martha Franks, Legal Counsel (contracted)
Karin Stangl, Planning and Communications Director
Maureen Haney, Communications Specialist

Presentation
Follingstad presented an overview of the New Mexico's state and regional water planning process to date, including data on population, water supply and demands, and an overview of the Southwest New Mexico Regional Water Plan.

Questions and comments on Presentation
Lucy Moore, contracted facilitator, took questions and comments from the audience on the presentation and other related water issues.

Question: What efforts has the state had made to include Native American governments and communities in this process?
Answer: Follingstad explained that Myron Armijo, Tribal Liaison to the OSE/ISC, holds quarterly meetings of the State Tribal Water Institute, an OSE forum open to all tribes and pueblos in New Mexico. In addition, two of the state water plan update meetings are scheduled be held in Indian country -- Gallup and Shiprock -- and there may be an additional meeting specifically for tribes and pueblos to learn about the state's process and offer their perspectives.

Comment: A participant noted that the Jemez adjudication was not yet complete, although the presentation indicated that it was.

Comment: There was concern about jurisdiction over brackish water deeper than 2,500 feet.
Answer: Although the Governor signed a bill authorizing the State Engineer to regulate these waters, over one million acre-feet of deep brackish water, claimed prior to that signing, will remain unregulated.

Comment: The planning process for these sub-basins (Rio Jemez and Rio Puerco Sub-regional Water Plans) was separate from that of the Middle Rio Grande, because of the differences in issues, priorities, economy and lifestyle. There was concern that these sub-basins were not sufficiently addressed in the presentation. Data from the Rio Jemez and Rio Puerco exists on the OSE website and the Water Assembly website (waterassembly.org).

Comment: Member of the Water Assembly (the public and stakeholder planning group for the Middle Rio Grande Region) expressed concern about the stateside water use data for the Middle Rio Grande Region. What was shown in the presentation is not the same as our Regional Water Plan (RWP).
Answer: The data used for all the regions for the SWP Update public outreach efforts came from the OSE Water Use and Conservation, 2005 Report. This data was compared to the Regional Water Plan data to demonstrate the overall trend that water demand (throughout the state and within the region), exceeds supply. OSE staff encourages local governments and any interested parties to participate in the regional water planning process to promote collaboration between the regions and the state in planning for future water for New Mexico.

Comment: A participant was concerned that the San Juan-Chama water was vulnerable to changes in climate, as well as to competition from other institutions, even other states, or from the Navajo Nation as a result of the water rights settlement. There was also discussion about the capacity of the diversion's physical infrastructures.

Comment: Concern about the high percentage of agricultural water use percentage, while Municipal and Industrial (M&I) were at least equal to irrigated agriculture in this region.
Answer: The data that informs the graphs in the presentation is from the Water Use and Conservation 2005 Water Use Report (found on the OSE website). There were figures in the presentation that represent water diversion statewide, in addition to figures that represent water diversions within the region.

Comment: There is concern about the accuracy of high population projections. A resident of the region felt that the projections were based on an academic approach, and did not reflect the reality of the impact of a changing economy and climate in the region. A purely statistical approach using past trends may not prove accurate. He recommended that planners and policy makers focus on issues relating to human needs and the quality of life.
Answer: Staff explained that the population projections were drawn from the most recent data source available, 'the 2008 Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) report, 'A Report on Historical and Future Population Dynamics in New Mexico Water Planning Regions' (found on

the OSE website). The methodology BBER used for this study is clearly outlined in the report. In addition, the most important findings from the report are the trends of growth throughout the state.

Comment: A participant pointed out that it is not a question of "if" we will need x amount of water, but rather "when." State supplies may reach their limit in 20 years, or 40 years, or 80 years, but it will inevitably happen, he added. What is important is that the State is planning for the future based on the most current data available and addressing the most obvious trends that data reveals.

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?***

    - Adjudication of the Middle Rio Grande was necessary for certainty and security of water rights and water use. The process should begin as quickly as possible, and be completed as efficiently as possible. Full adjudication allows the holder of the property right to receive full title to his/her water.
    - The State Engineer should not be a party in the adjudication, but rather serve to promote a more collaborative, less adversarial, process. Staff noted that adjudications do not provide quick answers and will take decades to complete.
    - Enforcement of New Mexico Water Code includes priority administration which if enforced ensures delivery to those water rights holders who are entitled to senior water rights and to provide a restraint to excessive water use.
    - Promote and provide incentives for agricultural conservation. Water saved by other conservation tactics is often lost to inefficient agricultural uses.
    - Need for local grassroots administration of water rights through local water banks which can help save small agriculture and protect community resources and culture. We need to stop the degradation of natural resources and top down water administration.
    - We need more accurate data on how water is used to insure water for the future. For instance, the real and potential impacts from Rio Rancho on these regions should be factored into good planning.

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?***

    - Need for resources and incentives for both agricultural and urban interests to implement conservation practices. Farmers mentioned the need for help, such as tax breaks, if they are to undertake conservation seriously.

- Better water use data is important for irrigators in making daily decisions about water use. Potentially useful data is currently available from the Stormwater Information Management Systems (SIMS) program, the Bureau of Reclamation website on climate conditions, the Upper Rio Grande Water Operations Model (URGWOM) program, and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) Collaborative Program. OSE should disseminate information on these resources on its website and from offices.
- Water Rate Structures minimize waste and reducing overall water use. A "dramatic" increase in the cost of water has more of an impact on water use than gradual increases.
- Statewide incentives such as Las Vegas' program that pays residents $ 1.00 per square foot to remove lawns.
- Revamping building codes to encourage more water conservation was important;
- Water leasing program between agriculture and municipalities such as the program in Los Angeles where farmers lease their water to the city at an increasing rate, doubling each month from June through September; it provides farmers an incentive to give up water during the months when the city needs it most.
- Large-scale underground injection of water, reducing the loss to evaporation and recharges the aquifer.
- Statewide conservation goals, by each sector of water use. Provide incentives to meet goals at the local level – small agriculture, large agriculture, urban, municipal and industrial, etc. – and require good monitoring and measuring of all supplies and uses.

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?***

- Need for statewide data collection on long-term climate variability to evaluate significant trends or change.
- Drought Planning for extreme years to inform residents about what to do. (Drought Monitoring Task Force meets monthly and includes all relevant state and federal agencies. The group evaluates the latest data).
- A 38-year resident of Placitas said that he has observed dramatic changes in both plant and bird species.
- Impacts of early snow melt, concerns about predictions of adequate precipitation but snowpack melting earlier, resulting in runoff not available to farmers.

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

- Prioritize and create standards for conservation-wise water projects; new projects or developments should be evaluated for their use of energy and water, and their waste production. Projects that consume large amounts of energy or water, or produce un-useable waste should not be approved.
- Desalination Projects hold potential for large amounts of water that it should be pursued, especially if the cost becomes reasonable.
- Adjudication is the most critical project the state could undertake.
- Aquifer Recharge Projects, like Bear Canyon, hold promise for conserving large amounts of water.
- Water Quality Projects for rural areas.
- Out of basin transfers are damaging to the communities and the ecosystem; strategies like local water banking could help keep water in its basin of origin.
- Projects like providing water to Carnuel in the East Mountains should be carefully managed.
- Projects that are listed in Regional Water Plan should be implemented as priorities.
- Need for state agency coordination on large water infrastructure projects for better water management in New Mexico. The Water Cabinet, which Governor Richardson has created to insure good communication among the state agencies.