



2009 State Water Plan Update Public Outreach

Region: Lea County
Lea County Event Center
Hobbs, NM
April 30, 2009

Summary of Discussion

Facilitator/Recorder: Janet Wolfe

Welcome and Introductions

Gretel Follingstad, State Water Planner with the Interstate Stream Commission, welcomed the group of about 10 to this public forum sponsored jointly by the Office of the State Engineer and the Interstate Stream Commission (OSE/ISC). She introduced agency staff and contractors:

Andy Morley, OSE, District II Staff Manager
Maureen Haney, Communications Specialist
Tracy Ikenberry, OSE, District II Staff
Tom Morrison, Hydrologist

Presentation

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

Questions and comments on Presentation

Janet Wolfe, contracted facilitator, took questions and comments from the audience on the presentation and other related water issues.

Comment: A participant acknowledged the hard work done to develop the Regional Water Plan and asked about what kind of funding was available for implementation.

Response: OSE/ISC representatives explained that the OSE/ISC did not have jurisdiction or ability to implement the water management strategies outlined in the Regional Water Plan.

Implementation is led by local and regional water management agencies, including municipalities, counties, irrigation districts, council's of government, etc. Other funding sources for implementation include the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, Drinking Water State Revolving Fund and Water Trust Board. It was also clarified that projects identified in regional water plans receive higher priority in the Water Trust Board application process.

Comment: Concern about contamination of groundwater supplies (fresh water aquifers) from faulty/damaged well casings in oil and gas wells. Does the OSE/ISC have any jurisdiction over regulating this?

Response: We are generally not aware of this sort of water waste, but it is worth checking into.

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?

- Participants stressed the importance of keeping our fresh water supplies safe. Areas of concern include, run-off from dairy farms and damaged oil and gas well casings allowing brine to contaminate fresh water aquifers.
- The designation of critical management areas by the OSE helps to control water usage by limiting/denying new appropriations and other measures.
- Enforce the 'cold basin' status by transferring water uses and allowing no new uses.
- Improve water rights administration to protect existing wells from going dry.
- As aquifer levels decline, it should cost more for people to pump wells, as an incentive to pump less water from drying aquifers.
- Water from poor quality wells should be treated and used.
- Control agricultural pumping: There is an over abundance of agriculture in this part of the state, mining the aquifer and running domestic wells dry.
- Deep well drilling: Explore deep brackish water as an alternative supply of water resources, 'Natural Blue Resources' proposal for 16 new deep wells in Lea County.

- Effluent reuse was suggested as means to conserve water to assure supplies for a growing population.
- Aquifer recharge projects to slow run-off and create catchment basins and better infiltration.
- Ordinances linking growth to water supply to curb unsustainable growth and development. It was suggested that ordinances linking growth to water supply could limit water demand.
- Many developers in Lea County don't provide water rights for their new developments, we need better regulations and enforcement.

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?***

- Metering: All wells would help to prevent water users from pumping more than they are legally entitled. It was also suggested that high volume uses should be a higher priority for metering and monitoring.
- High volume water users should be the first to conserve: Large agricultural operations are making money at our community's expense.
- Interstate conservation measures: For example, planning and undertaking conservation measures cooperatively with neighboring states (e.g., Texas, Colorado) and particularly in borders areas.
- Rate structures create incentive to conserve water: In order to save money, the City of Hobbs is currently using graduated rates structures.
- Domestic conservation methods: These should be enforced in our communities.
- Rationing: Water rationing was another method of conservation that was suggested. An example was designating specific water days.
- Xeriscaping incentives: These were suggested for property owners to convert lawns and other high-water-use plants to desert plants.

- Lea County is closed to new appropriations as of February 13, 2003: Hydrologist Tom Morrison said the new rules and regulations regarding the closed basin will be presented to the public in May 2009.
 - Prevent out of basin transfers through statewide laws: This could help conserve water regionally (though not on a statewide basis).
 - Great concern about groundwater degradation caused by damaged or faulty oil well casings. A representative from the OSE indicated that the New Mexico Oil Conservation Division (OCD) is responsible for inspection of such casings. The participant suggested a cooperative effort between OSE and OCD to ensure these issues are addressed.
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?*
- Drier climate has been observed in the south over the past year.
 - Fewer dust storms observed in recent years than used to occur in the 1940s and 1950s: This was attributed to the Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) Conservation Reserve Program, which was responsible for taking dry land farms out of production.
 - Different bird species have been observed: This is an indication the region's climate has changed over time.
 - Very short winters: In recent years, shorter winters have been observed as compared to the past.
 - Conservation: This should be our highest priority, regionally and statewide.
 - Drought management plans: It was suggested these should be developed, implemented and adhered to by local authorities to assure there are resources for the future.
 - Statewide coordination between agencies: There was a suggestion to have better coordination among agencies for water administration, enforcement of rules and regulation and disaster preparation.

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

- Graduated water rate structures for municipal water customers: These were suggested as an important program for the region and statewide to provide incentive to reduce municipal water use.
- Effluent reuse from wastewater treatment facilities: This was suggested as a great way to reduce mining ground water for outdoor watering. It was indicated that the City of Hobbs already has a program in place, but suggested expanding that program and implementing in other areas of the state as well.
- Feasibility studies for the development of deep aquifers: For example, aquifer testing. Water formations should be a high priority for funding.
- Several residents from the community of Knowles expressed their need for a regional water system to supply residents in the area: Many of the residents in the area have very low producing wells due to the declining water levels in the Ogallala aquifer. It was suggested that the development of a local or regional water association to develop one or more deep production wells and transmit water to the homes in the area would be most effective.
- Money for Jal: The City of Jal is in the process of constructing a 1 million gallon water storage tank, and needs money for completion.
- Water conservation education: Public education program on water conservation should be a high priority for the state. It's the easiest way to foster more water supplies.
- Texas – New Mexico border buffer zone: It was suggested that a buffer zone of 15 miles would capture the underground flow towards Texas and to assure less drawdown on the Texas side of the border.
- Importing desalinated water: A participant suggested that New Mexico could import desalinated water from Houston or other areas.
- Regional water programs: Programs to develop regional water treatment systems and mutual domestics, for Lea County were suggested instead of using individual septic systems.

Additional comments:

Follingstad thanked the participants for attending and contributing to the State Water Plan Update. She also reminded the group that there are a variety of ways to comment on the state water planning process, including checking the OSE/ISC website, the comment form or by email. Follingstad thanked everyone for their comments and their commitment to helping make the State Water Plan as comprehensive and useful as possible.

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