



2009 State Water Plan Update Public Outreach

Region: Northeast New Mexico
Tucumcari Convention Center
Tucumcari, NM
May 6, 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 20 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:

Mark Murphy, ISC Canadian Basin Manager
Chris Shaw, ISC Legal Counsel
Tim Farmer, District VII (Cimarron) Supervisor
Greg Quartieri, District VII Staff
Kevin Myers, OSE Hydrologist
Maureen Haney, Communications Specialist

Presentation

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

Question: Is water use for irrigation included in the demand projection demonstrated in the graphs in the presentation?

Response: Follingstad explained that the data for the graphs came directly from the Northeast New Mexico regional water plan. The participants who developed the regional water plan included the following anticipated uses: irrigation, municipal and industrial, and other uses.

Question: What percent of supply projections is water yield from Colorado (runoff)?

Response: The exact percentage was unknown, but it was agreed that this amount represents a very small amount of the overall supply for the region.

Comment: A participant expressed concern over the lack of irrigation water this year for the Arch Hurley Conservancy District (Conchas Dam). Participants were concerned that upstream users are diverting more water than their water rights allow.

Response: Tim Farmer of the Cimarron District Office explained that the OSE is working hard to evaluate the water situation by reviewing upstream diversions. He said that they now have two staff members in that office dedicated primarily to conducting this review.

Comment: Participants were appreciative that the state opened this new district office. However, there is concern that more resources are needed to complete the process. Participants asked what could be done to accelerate this process.

Response: OSE staff explained that the best avenue to increase OSE staffing for this effort would be through contacting their state representatives.

Question: What is the delivery priority of water from Conchas Dam and will the Arch Hurley Conservancy District get first priority?

Response: Staff explained that the priority of the water rights (senior or junior) determines who gets water first.

Comment: A participant was concerned about what would happen if the New Mexico Rural Water Association (NMRWA) contractors used all of the water in Ute Reservoir, and whether the water in Conchas Dam would be at risk.

Response: Staff explained that the NMRWA contractors do not have rights to the water in Conchas Dam. Therefore, under current law, they would not have access to this water.

Comment: Potential amendment to the Clean Water Act (CWA) could result in increased control of water bodies by the federal government and could impact regional planning.

Response: OSE representatives explained that Clean Water Act compliance is not within their jurisdiction and suggested that the individual contact the Albuquerque District Office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. [Senator Russell Feingold introduced S. 787, the "Clean Water Restoration Act," on April 2, 2009, to amend the CWA and clarify the jurisdiction of "waters of the United States." The intent of the bill is to restore protections for rivers, streams and wetlands that may be subject to question due to recent Supreme Court rulings.]

Question: What is the basis of data for the supply/demand gap? It doesn't seem to add up correctly based on the information shown?

Response: Staff explained the demand gap was calculated using the projected demand from the Northeast New Mexico Regional Water Plan and current OSE data on water use, from the "Water Use and Conservation 2005 Report." Therefore, it does not correspond directly with the 2008 BBER population projection numbers.

Question: What is being done, and what can be done about controlling water use on borders with Texas, Colorado, and Arizona? How can we influence other states' water use and how it impacts New Mexico?

Response: Currently, there are no “groundwater compacts” and that the best thing we can do currently to protect our water resources from other states is to demonstrate our intention and plan to use those resources. A representative from the OSE mentioned an ongoing court dispute between the states of Utah and Nevada regarding groundwater and that the outcome of this dispute could set a precedent for future interstate groundwater law. In addition, there is not currently an effective forum for cooperative discussions about water planning with other states, but that this was something the ISC was pursuing.

Question: How we can address the gap between projected demand and projected supply?

Response: Follingstad explained that regional and state water planning processes are intended to facilitate the process of finding strategies and solutions to address this question. The objective at the local level is to implement the strategies laid out in the Regional Water Plan. Please note the strategies identified in the Regional Water Plan receive higher priority for funding by the Water Trust Board.

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?

- Adequately staffing district offices: Participants stressed the importance of this objective, in particular the Cimarron office needs more staff to monitor wells.
- Redefine water planning regions: A participant suggested boundaries for regional water plans could be redrawn for better local response. In particular, the Northeast New Mexico region is very large and water interests vary considerably between the north where surface water is more heavily relied upon and the south where groundwater is the primary source. The participant suggested that Ute Dam to the state line would be more appropriate.
- Loosing water to critical habitat areas: Concern about an area of the Canadian River being put back on the critical habitat list (Endangered Species Act) for the Arkansas River Shiner due to a lawsuit filed by environmental groups was expressed, participants were worried about losing this water in the region? ISC Canadian Basin Manager Mark Murphy said that the area of concern has not been put back on the critical habitat list, and he believes it is unlikely that it will be. He also expressed that we have a strong management plan in place. However, Murphy agreed that we do need to stay ahead of the curve on endangered species issues.

- Local water treatment facilities: Ute Reservoir water for the Eastern New Mexico Rural Water System (ENMRWS) should be treated locally to enable Tucumcari to meet future water needs. The Cities of Tucumcari and Logan elected not to participate in the project because of water quality problems that can result when water is piped long distances. These concerns were addressed by determining there should be a treatment plan in Curry County. Quay County also pulled out of the ENMRWS plan.
- Non-native species removal: Prioritize salt cedar removal.
- Measuring water use: Place measuring devices on the Canadian River to make sure no one is using more water than they are rightfully entitled.

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?***

- Removal of high-water use invasive species: It was again suggested to prioritize salt cedar removal as a measure to conserve water.
- More active metering and measuring: A participant suggested placing metering and monitoring devices throughout the state to ensure that water users use only water that they have legal right to.
- Low-water-use businesses: A participant suggested that economic development agencies and organizations should focus on recruiting to New Mexico primarily industries that require little water.
- Lining canals: A participant suggested this would ensure more water reaches crop via irrigation canals rather than being lost to recharge, as a water conservation measure.
- Water reuse/gray water use: These were recommended as a means of conserving water in municipalities.
- Public education programs: Participants suggested having more programs on water use conservation/water restrictions to teach people the value of water and how to conserve water.
- Storm water capture: One participant noted storm water runoff could be used for multiple outdoor uses.

- Block rate structures: A participant suggested using block rate structures as an incentive for consumers to use less and pay less this would provide increased incentive to conserve.
 - Support agricultural science: Specifically and participant suggested supporting science to help advance low-flow irrigation methods and determine the best crops for the local dry conditions.
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?***
- Continuous drought: Participants have noticed continuous and more severe droughts.
 - Increased wind: Participants have noticed increased winds and the affects of them in their communities.
 - Increased temperatures and decreased precipitation: Participants noted that it has generally been hotter with less rain and snow. One participant mentioned that there was less water in Conchas Dam than there was 10 years ago.
 - Measuring/metering to control water use: It was suggested that existing water laws be enforced to prepare for the future.
 - Monitor climate conditions: Participants stressed the importance of being aware of the rates of change to properly plan for our future.
4. ***What water projects are needed in your region? How should these projects be prioritized for funding?***

- Lining canals: This method was again suggested as a water conservation measure to ensure more water reaches crop via irrigation canals rather than being lost to recharge.
- Pipeline installation: A participant suggested using pipelines instead of canals to transport water to reduce the amount of water lost to evaporation.
- Invasive species management: Participants reiterated the removal of high-water use invasive species such as salt cedar as a measure to conserve water.
- Watershed restoration: Participants suggested projects that include tree thinning, erosion control, and other means of restoration to improve water quality, infiltration and increase water in rivers and streams.

- Better rangeland management: A participant suggested rangeland management to improve water quality and control erosion in our watershed.
- Update existing infrastructure: Participants noted that infrastructure updates could reduce leaks in our water systems and could improve water quality through better treatment technologies.
- Municipal effluent reuse programs: A participant suggested such programs to better manage our water resources.

Additional comments:

Follingstad thanked the participants for attending and contributing to the State Water Plan Update and reminded the group that there are a variety of ways to comment on the state water planning process, including visiting the OSE/ISC website, the comment form or by email. She then 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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