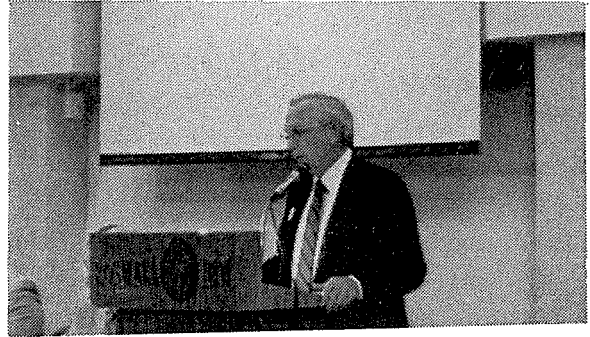


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REGIONAL WATER PLANNING

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It is a pleasure to be here and hopefully to make you more aware of regional water planning efforts in New Mexico. While all of us are continually engaged in managing water matters in our own way and in our own locale, the *planning* of this management activity is something that, whether we consciously realize it or not, goes hand in glove with our daily routine.

Planning comes in many forms. I suppose the first exercise in water planning in New Mexico goes back to the days of the Spanish settlers and the subsequent decisions made by those settlers, their governments, and their choice to follow the Doctrine of Prior Appropriation in the beneficial use and allocation of who uses what water and where. Even before that, I am sure the native Americans living in the arid Southwest had plans to maximize their use of this precious resource, even if it meant migrating to sources of water for their livelihood.

Today, conscientious water planning is more important than ever. The photograph on the conference program's cover illustrates only half of the story. It is a photograph of a flowing artesian well in the Roswell area. As you know, this artesian basin is one of the most prolific recharge areas in the United States. During settlement of the Roswell area, there were no less than four flowing, live streams passing in and around Roswell, at least two

of which came from huge springs in the immediate Roswell area. This bountiful supply of water resulted in dramatic growth of the area and the Pecos Valley. It even brought in the railroad.

Shortly before the turn of the century, the first artesian well was discovered and subsequently made Roswell one of the most attractive farming areas ever known. The largest artesian well in the world was just southeast of town and it was known to flow at least 12,000 gallons per minute. One historical account put it this way: "Government experts...assessed the situation and pronounced the flow *permanent*."

Today there are no flowing wells of any consequence and no live streams flowing through town. Of course, the Pecos is still out there - very tightly controlled by its present users, including the state of Texas. Today too, the site of the photograph on our program is no longer the same. The water is very brackish, the soil is alkaline, the original owners have long since gone, and farming is about as tough as it gets.

Now I don't mean to cast any disparity on our early farmers, nor do I intend to paint a picture of doom for the Roswell farming economy. Farming, and our local community are alive and well. However, the successes of our present economy, albeit far different than it was eighty years ago, is the

direct result of planning, both long and short range, by many of our far-sighted farmers and public officials.

Population trends in New Mexico tell an interesting story. One has to look also at the growth of population in our neighboring states, especially those states whose water supply is very closely related to waters originating on or flowing through New Mexico. With New Mexico's population now exceeding one million, with Albuquerque becoming another Phoenix, with Las Cruces turning rapidly into a major city, with newcomers flocking to Santa Fe, with virtually all our cities competing for the economic development dollar, and with very little unappropriated water to plan on, an ongoing and innovative system of water planning is essential.

As our growing population's need for water increases, so too does a proportionate share of the water going to agriculture dwindle. This is a truism throughout the world. As urban growth supplants agriculture, the beneficial use of water shifts, not only from rural to urban, but from use by a relatively few to use by large numbers of folks, all with different needs. Recent studies show that 70 percent of our water is dedicated to agricultural uses. Our farming and ranching economy is the backbone to the viability of New Mexico as a place to live. We cannot afford to lose this important activity and culture. With at least 90 percent of New Mexico lands engaged in agriculture, the resultant tax base is the key to virtually everything we do at both state and local levels. Our whole infrastructure is keyed on the value of agriculture - our schools and roads especially. So, as we talk about water planning, we must include all facets of our state, including agriculture.

As I mentioned, water planning has been around a long time. Even though every community, every county, and the state government itself has, in their own ways, constantly engaged themselves in planning for their water needs, each area or region of New Mexico is different. In many instances, however, local needs are not much different than the needs of the next community or county.

For example, the declining ground-water table in eastern New Mexico causes a great deal of concern. This area is studying the problem and is anxious to take actions toward a solution. Conservation will play a great part in the planning process. Furthermore, the situation in eastern New Mexico is in no way like that existing in any other part of the state. In Gallup, the physical shortage of water is of great concern. Northern New Mexico area residents are concerned about the implications of acequia

water rights being transferred to other uses. Shifting traditional beneficial water uses to industry raises many questions for those regions of the state actively pursuing economic and industrial development plans. Future ground-water pumping in outlying Albuquerque areas, as it relates to transfer of water rights, is of concern. Regional water planning therefore becomes a viable option to these and many other regions of the state.

The need and desirability of regional water planning in its present form is the direct result of the New Mexico Legislature's enactment of Chapter 182, 1987 Laws (House Bill 337, as amended). These legislators, exercising some very far-sighted wisdom, recognized the problems facing a rapidly changing and growing political body known as the state of New Mexico. They recognized too, that although our water belongs to the people of New Mexico, every region has its own unique supplies and needs. This act placed the responsibility of regional water planning on the Interstate Stream Commission. This was a logical choice inasmuch as the commission is composed of eight gubernatorial appointees, each from the major irrigation districts of the state. A ninth member, by law, is the state engineer. In addition, for the first time, the commission was empowered to "...appropriate ground water or purchase water rights on behalf of any of the various regions of the state." The act does not permit the condemnation of water rights nor any action which may affect the water rights of Indian tribes. The present efforts to conduct regional water planning is a logical first step in fulfilling this legislative mandate, that is, the authority vested with the Interstate Stream Commission to appropriate ground water or buy water rights for the benefit of a specific region of the state.

The commission's mandate to set up regional water planning in New Mexico begins with its responsibility to design and implement a program in which applicants may apply for funding under this statute. Criteria has been established and the first grants were made in 1987.

The commission's authority to set criteria include:

1. Identification of the "planning region" and why it is hydrologically or politically appropriate
2. An appropriate planning process
3. Completion costs and timetables
4. Identification of other sources of funding for regional planning
5. Ground rules for regional applications and review guidelines for the commission leading to applicant funding to the applicant

Regional Water Planning

Applicant eligibility under this act is quite broad, although the applicant must be a political entity or a combination of several political entities operating under a joint powers agreement. The applicant must be part of a "water planning region" as determined by the Interstate Stream Commission. When two or more parties join forces, they must demonstrate common political and economic interests.

The Interstate Stream Commission is now in its third year of implementing Chapter 182. The commission, with the support of Commission Secretary Reynolds and his staff, have entered this endeavor with the knowledge that the fruits of their labors will be a more secure and stable water supply for New Mexicans, at least for the prescribed forty years into the future.

To be honest, I personally had serious reservations concerning the result of each region submitting its own version of its water needs. I envisioned a monstrous "mishmash" of data, statistics, and plans that did not relate to other regions around the state, and the information would never be used. As we learned more about the motives of regional water planning, and what the end result might be, we began to realize that this was an opportunity for local government and its citizens to have a say in an issue that directly affects their future livelihood. In many ways, it is an opportunity they never had before. It not only serves to dispel any frustrations local folks might have toward "higher authority," but it gives them the chance to get involved in the decision-making process. To me, perhaps the most important benefit is the enhancement of local citizens' knowledge. A "sense of belonging" is a very strong need in most people's lives, and here is a chance for that desire to be realized.

The first appropriation, two years ago, was quite modest. It gave the commission a chance to get a better feel for the process, and it served to make the various areas of the state a little more aware of what the process entailed. The commission was given \$150,000 to allocate to qualified applicants. Obviously, that amount of money would not go very far, however, there were only three applicants that first year, and all three received grants, which coupled with local monies, totaled an additional \$130,000. Those grants went to the Eastern Plains Council of Governments, the San Juan Water Commission, and the Santa Fe Metropolitan Water Board. Indications are that these three entities have made good use of this resource.

In 1988, \$250,000 was appropriated. Word got around and the commission found itself considering

requests for \$1,618,371 from fifteen applicants. The hearings, held in October of last year, further bolstered my feelings that regional water planning will not only provide tremendous amounts of useful information, but has given many people the chance to become more aware of their needs and what can be done about them. After two days of tough interviews with each of the applicants, the \$250,000 allocation was awarded to six applicants. These awards went to the Southwest New Mexico Council of Governments and Black Range Resource Conservation and Development Water Task Force, the Southeastern New Mexico Council of Governments, the city of Gallup, the North Central New Mexico Economic Development District, the Mora San Miguel Water Plan Committee, and the Southeastern New Mexico Economic Development District.

This year, twelve applications requesting \$828,355 were received. This year, \$350,000 has been appropriated. Hearings will be held next week in Santa Fe, and I am sure the full appropriation will be awarded.

The state legislature has taken the strong position that regional water planning is vital to the future of New Mexico. Going back to one of the original intents of the legislation, regional planning is the key to the state being empowered to appropriate ground water or purchase water rights for the benefit of a given region. But first, a water plan must be in place. The governor is a strong advocate of the concept. With his background in agriculture, and his huge dedication to economic development for our state, he knows all too well that long-range planning of our water needs is perhaps the single most important element for assuring our future in this wonderful and dynamic part of the desert and mountainous southwest.