

REMARKS MADE BY PROFESSOR AL UTTON
UPON RECEIVING AN AWARD OF APPRECIATION
AT THE 40TH ANNUAL NEW MEXICO WATER CONFERENCE

Thank you. I think this award is in some doubt because Tom Bahr has revealed a conflict of interest in giving this. I can remember when I was part of a group who interviewed people for the WRRRI director's position and wondered, "Who is this limnologist from Michigan and what is limnology?" But we picked a keeper and we are delighted to have Tom Bahr here heading up the institute.

I arrived only a few minutes ago, and was thinking that it pays to be late—tardiness has its rewards and virtues. I was supposed to have arrived yesterday, but I spent most of yesterday talking to doctors and at labs, which reminds me of a Spanish dicho that I have on a tile on my chimney mantelpiece. "Cuidate de perros a los lados, de mulas por detras, y de medicos, abogados, y curas de todos lados." In English, "Be careful of dogs from the sides, mules from the rear, and doctors, lawyers and priests from all sides." I think that is particularly appropriate in the case of doctors.

I would like to pay tribute to Tom Bahr, Bobby Creel, and the entire staff of the Water Resources Research Institute. They provide a forum for all of us, a catalyst for all of us who are trying to deal with this limited resource in a thirsty region. The WRRRI brings us together every year and allows us to cross-pollinate, share, and ask how we are going to deal with our water problems. We have communicated over coffee or a margarita and we deal with things in a way that we cannot do isolated in our offices with faxes and so forth. We can conduct research back home, but these kinds of meetings, where the water community is brought together, is where we can share in this huge responsibility, and for that I have to say we are in your debt, New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute.

We are in a special region, this special geographical location where we are standing and seated today—the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the Mesilla Valley. We are talking about lots of issues, but one of those issues which has been raised repeatedly by the great panel this morning is how can we manage the precious water resources in a transboundary situation. How do we do it? Someone has come along and drawn political boundaries all over the place and run a river and some aquifers through it and said, "Now,

you guys deal with it." That is a real challenge and we are working on it, although we do not always do it in the best way. We are dealing with three states and Mexico. We tend to ignore each other as the panel this morning pointed out. We have the "white map" problem. Our maps only show Mexico as being white, with more colors on the United States side, and their maps do just exactly the opposite. We in New Mexico tend to forget about Texas downstream. We heard the story this morning about the governor of New Mexico saying he did not want to give Texas any water. "Over our dead body," is what he said. But we would like water from Colorado. And how about when Mexico is short of water and they go to the governor of Texas like they did this last year? It is hard to reach across those boundaries. Meetings like this are really important in helping us deal with these boundaries.

If I were to pick out three words as foundation stones—and you have heard them all this morning—they would be the words security, cooperation and planning. Why security? We all have to know to what we are entitled. Thus, we have compacts and water rights so we can have some security and plan for our future. We know what is ours. But then we have to somehow reach across those boundaries and cooperate some way. The New Mexico/Texas Commission is working on that experiment.

We like to laugh about lawyers but the lawyers, if they are worth their salt, really are working to get rid of the disputes and work toward resolutions. We have all heard the joke about the definition of a water dispute. There is a cartoon of a cow with a farmer pulling on the rein at the head and another farmer, an irrigator, pulling on the tail at the other end. On a three-legged stool sits a lawyer milking the cow. The reason it's a funny cartoon is because there's lots of truth in it.

For a joke to be funny, it has to have truth in it. We have done a lot of milking the cow, between El Paso and Doña Ana County, but with the help of some lawyers and a good judge from up north by the name of Perez, we now have the New Mexico/Texas Commission working cooperatively. We must somehow reach across these boundaries, reach across our

personal human limitations, and determine how to proceed—and that includes Mexico.

Then that takes us to that very closely related word, planning. I have to agree with Jack Hammond that we are dealing with such a limited resource that we have to plan and work together on how to best use the resource in the context of having secure water rights and secure compact allocations. We must cooperate and plan, all of which is like motherhood.

I would like to add to what Cruz Ito of the International Boundary and Water Commission said. We have the 1906 treaty and the 1938 compact, and those are major twentieth century accomplishments. But we still have a ways to go. We have unfinished business and that is to what Cruz Ito referred.

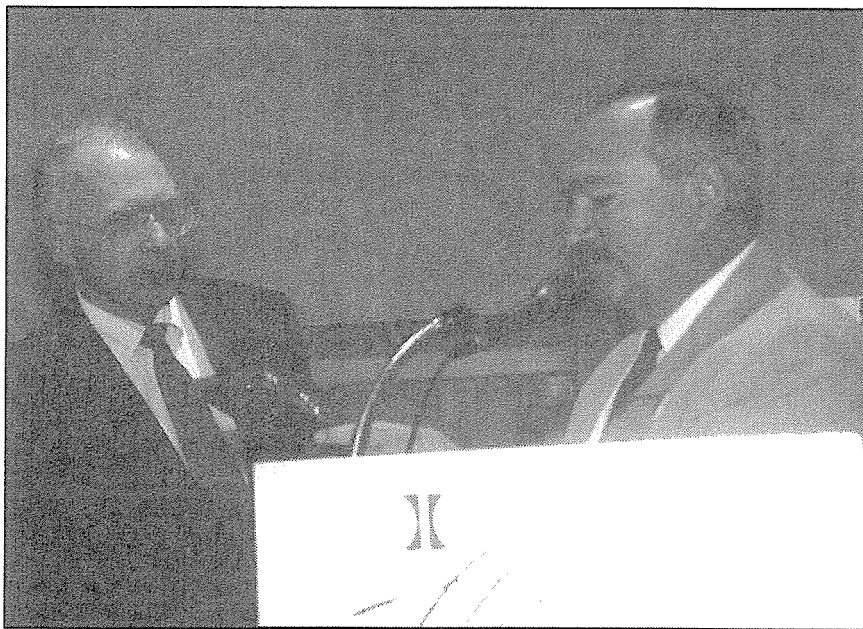
Groundwater has been out of sight and out of mind. Mexico would like another 60,000 acre-feet of surface water, and if we do not reach an agreement with Mexico, what is to prevent them from taking it underground, under the table? None of us have any security in this border region. Doña Ana County, El Paso, Chihuahua—we have a game without rules. We have not been able to secure our groundwater relations. We delay reaching agreement and settling our groundwater arrangements with Mexico at our peril. We must move forward on that although politically it is almost impossible.

That is all in the vein of saying that we happen to be in one of those special areas which is crisscrossed

with political boundaries, and contains the trans-boundary situation. So we have to work extra hard at trying to seek, share, manage, cooperate, and plan together. I think the New Mexico/Texas Water Commission has made some great advances in that direction, but we must continue to support its efforts.

Then we have other institutions. In New Mexico, we have the State Engineer Office and the Interstate Stream Commission. I have had the honor and the pleasure of working with the Interstate Stream Commission. The commissioners are citizens, and many of you here probably do not know who they are outside of your district, but they come from every major drainage basin in the state. The commission constitutes a treasure for New Mexico and this region. Why do I say treasure? Among the reasons is that water management is something like 60 percent to maybe 95 percent history. Someone asks, "How about all the politics?" That is part of the history, too. So keeping that history and institutional memory alive is absolutely essential in managing water resources. Every bend of the river has its own history and that is what fascinates us all. What makes it so much fun, so interesting, is that the history of every stream and every river is different and special. It is important that institutions like the Interstate Stream Commission with its secretary, the State Engineer, be kept above personal and party politics so that we can retain that treasure, that institutional memory, so that we are better equipped to deal with regional water issues.

So what have I said this morning? Number one, be careful of doctors. Number two, we are really fortunate to have the Water Resources Research Institute and Tom Bahr bring us together and allow us to talk to each other. Third, transboundary water management is tough stuff and we really have to work at it in a spirit of cooperation, and we do have to plan. Fourth, I just paid tribute to the Interstate Stream Commission and its secretary, the State Engineer, and I wish them well. Thank you.



Al Utton received an award of appreciation for serving on the Interstate Stream Commission for 20 years. Tom Bahr (right) presented the award.