

Regional Water Planners Panel Discussion

Tom Bates, Southwest Region

Tom has spent the last 18 years in city government, ten years as Town Manager in Silver City and eight years as Special Project Coordinator in Deming, always with an interest in water involvement. While in Deming, he served as the Southwest Region Water Manager and was responsible for the overall coordination of writing the Southwest Regional Water Plan. While in Silver City, his efforts included recycling, public transportation, and a no smoking in public facilities resolution. In Deming, Tom was responsible for the Peru Mill reclamation, the largest earth moving project in southwestern New Mexico that now serves as a model for the Southwest Region of the U.S. He was also responsible for the permitting and all but the final stages of the construction of the Deming/Luna County landfill. Tom's undergraduate degree is from Montana State and he has master's degrees from Western Kentucky University in public administration and government. He retired in January of this year, but still works on water issues for the City of Deming and Luna County as a water contractor.



As Karl said in my introduction, I was the Southwest Regional Planning Manager and, as such, I was responsible for coordinating the writing of the Southwest Region Water Plan. It is a process that took two to three years, and this was my first real exposure to many of the water studies done in the Southwest region of the state and to the water experts in the area. We hired Daniel B. Stephens and Associates and were guided through the process by Joanne Hilton and John Burkstaller. I think DB Stephens has done seven or eight of the regional water plans.

The experience was a good one; the regional water planning committee was open to anyone and everyone and initially it was somewhat contentious. Originally, the plan was to be done by the Black Range RC&D. At one point, they wanted more money but it was held up and I came late into the situation when there was some hostility. At our meetings, we had general rules about respecting the speaker while being hard on the issues. One

thing we didn't do, and if I had to do it over again I would, was to limit the time a person could speak to two or three minutes so that everybody had a chance to speak. To some extent much of the discussion was, if not non-relevant, marginally relevant. The problem with that is that if somebody dominates the discussion, you can't shut them down while they argue about whether what they are talking about is relevant or not. And the other members feel like their time is being wasted. I do think that a short presentation is less contentious. I enjoyed one of our speakers who defined "input" as information that helps with the decision-making process. When you get input, the reaction is, "Aha, that's great." That may be an exaggeration, but I think that was one of the real lessons learned.

The plan draft was written and subsequently taken to all the communities where we received input. The input was then incorporated into the final plan. The plan generally was as good as the data that DB Stephens had. In some cases, data

were missing and we were told that they believed the data were correct with 60-80 percent confidence. To really update our plan correctly, we must do a bit more research.

We then briefed the plan to each of the county and municipal governments and they approved it with the promise that they would implement and enforce the plan and not simply put it on the shelf. In reality, the region has no structure, staff, or enforcement capabilities. We went so far as to require county water budgets but those are being ignored and I think the reason has been mentioned several times: new economic development, jobs, and getting reelected are all more important than cutting off somebody's water. I agree with what Angela Bordegaray said earlier that even though the plan is not being enforced in many areas, and certainly not in ours, it does increase awareness of the scarcity and the importance of water. In our region at least, people do realize that if we don't conserve our water, eventually we will run out of water.

We are now in a similar process in the Southwest Region for deciding what we should do with the 14,000 acre-feet of water that has been granted to the region annually by the Arizona Water Settlement Act. We are trying to make decisions using the best science available. I think the Southwest Regional Water Plan has given us confidence in how to go about this and from that perspective, the planning process has been very valuable. The work of Sandia National Laboratories in modeling river flow has been world class. The modelers are fantastic and the software is world class. Based on this work, we have a pretty good idea of our water situation.

Thank you.