

Regional Water Planners Panel Discussion

Joe Quintana, Middle Rio Grande

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Thank you. This discussion should bring today's topics full circle. We started this morning with the staff from the Office of the State Engineer talking about the state water planning process with reference to regional water planning. So, now we are looking at the state water plan from the regional water planning perspective. One of the challenges that we had when we were asked to be on this panel was to compare the process for developing the state water plan in 2003 and then again in 2009 when all of the regional water plans had been completed.

So let's look at how the two planning processes compare (Fig. 1). In 2003, a report that was put out a year earlier provided a framework for public input into the state water plan. So there was a lot of previous work that had been done before extensive citizen input was brought in. There were 29 public meetings statewide, not unlike what has been done this year when 22 public meetings were conducted statewide. Both of the public meeting series followed a similar process; and summaries or public comment synthesis reports are available. Prior to the planning effort in 2003, fact sheets were

published and distributed widely, so there was a lot of information going out to the public before developing the state water plan.

2003 State Water Plan	2008-09 State Water Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 2002 Framework for Public Input to a State Water Plan ■ Public Input Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 29 Public Meetings Statewide ■ Public Comment Synthesis Report ■ Distribution of 10 fact sheets ■ Town Hall Meeting in Albuquerque ■ 2004 State Water Plan Implementation Report ■ Ad Hoc Regional Water Planning Committee ■ Seven Regional Water Plans completed and accepted by ISC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ State Water Plan Progress Report issued June 2006 ■ Public Input Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 22 Public Meetings Statewide including the State-Tribal Water Institute ■ Summary data: regional water plans ■ Distribution of updated fact sheets ■ Meeting Notes for each meeting ■ Regional Water Planning Advisory Council ■ 16 Regional Water Plans completed and accepted by ISC

Figure 1. State Water Plans: Then and Now

In 2003, there were only 7 regional water plans that had been completed and accepted by the Interstate Stream Commission. So there weren't really enough regional water plans that could be compared and contrasted as a basis for the statewide plan. The state water plan at that time was more oriented towards the state water

assessment and statewide water resource needs. Regional water planning efforts at that time were discussed by an ad hoc regional water planning committee created by the Office of the State Engineer staff. That committee evolved and still operates today as the regional water planning advisory council. It is a group of regional water planners from the 16 regions, facilitated by staff from the Office of the State Engineer. The regional water planners talk and argue monthly but it has been a good input for the state staff to hear directly from the water planning regions. The state water plan for 2003 was a thick document. About two years later, there was a progress report that came out and reviewed what the state and regional water planners had accomplished. One thing that was different about the 2003 state water planning process was a “New Mexico First” Town Hall Meeting conducted in Albuquerque as an intense two-day conference where everybody was working on many water issues at one time.

What is different for the 2008-09 process is that there is already a state water plan in effect. We are asking questions about whether or not it is still applicable, what issues are new, and what accomplishments have been made. We are looking at the state water plan from a different perspective. The existing state water plan needs to be changed and updated and made more effective because plans don't hold up over time as circumstances change. The current process is starting with something that is already completed, whereas in 2003 there was basically a blank slate for the state water plan without much input from regional water plans.

Figure 2 is a map of the 16 water planning regions, you've seen this earlier and you will hear a little bit about what we did in the Middle Rio Grande Water Plan; Tom Bates will be talking about the Southwest New Mexico Regional Water Plan; and Randy Kirkpatrick will talk about the San Juan Regional Water Plan at the end. These regional water plans are quite different from each other. The socio-economic characteristics in those areas and the organizational structures for regional water planning are all very different.

For the Middle Rio Grande region (Fig. 3), our plan was accepted by the ISC in 2004 at the end of a six or seven year process. It was quite an undertaking because we had big players in the planning process, and major influential political jurisdictions were involved. One of the major constraints for our planning process was that

early on a water budget had been calculated and we were looking at quite a significant annual water deficit, ranging from 55,000 acre-ft/year to even higher estimates. Our supply and demand are way out of balance. The Plan itself had 43 recommendations in 9 different categories. Some of the recommendations are being implemented, but there has not been any significant funding. Some funding has been provided by the State for implementation of regional water plans and some funding has been available for updates to plans over the years since they were completed. Much of the effort by the Office of the State Engineer was to just get all of the regional water plans completed by 2008.



Figure 2. Map of the 16 Water Planning Regions

- Accepted by the ISC on August 17, 2004
- Water budget: demand exceeds supply by about 55,000 acre-feet per year
- 43 Recommendations (9 categories)
- Plan implementation activities
 - Survey of local government water conservation activities
 - Development of a Model Water Conservation Program
 - MRCOG Water Resources Board: cooperative regional water planning and management
 - Bosque restoration (non-native tree thinning)
 - Application for funding regional toilet retrofit program

Figure 3. Middle Rio Grande Regional Water Plan

What we are able to accomplish in our water plan, as in most of them, is water conservation. You don't have to know exactly how much water you are using or how much water you have; it is just common sense in this area of the country that you would conserve water by using water as efficiently and effectively as possible. Those kinds of activities are the low-hanging fruit that we continue to go after.

First let me say something about our organizational structure. The Mid-Region Council of Governments has a regional Water Resources Board which was working in conjunction with the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly in creating the plan. Both of those organizations are continuing to work on different aspects of the plan. The Water Resources Board is made up of the governmental jurisdictions within the planning area; so we reviewed what the cities, towns, villages, and counties were doing in terms of water conservation. A survey was conducted of all the local governments and a matrix was prepared to list all the recommendations in the Regional Water Plan; and to check which activities were being carried out by the local governments. We found that many communities were doing very little, but some were doing a lot. The Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority is probably the gold standard for the most extensive water conservation activities. They are setting an example for the smaller jurisdictions.

The Council of Governments staff has developed a model water conservation program that was targeted for small municipalities. In that model, there are 10 steps for conducting a water conservation program. The model also proposed two ordinances: one that had to do with eliminating water waste and setting up a system for penalizing those who were wasting water or creating what we call fugitive water. The other ordinance developed a process for establishing an emergency water shortage plan where the local government could take actions to cut back on water use and impose water use restrictions community wide. There doesn't have to be a drought in effect because water systems can go down with just a pump breakdown. The objective is to get all of our local governments to adopt emergency water shortage plans.

The Water Resources Board meets four times a year as an advisory body to the Council of Governments' Board of Directors. They meet basically to keep up with water issues around the region; more like a forum to exchange information

about water and find ways to implement the regional water plan. Running parallel to this is the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly with their public information program. They have annual meetings; and this year's will be October 24 at UNM at Dane Smith Hall. It is a Saturday all day session.

So those are the activities that have been going on since the regional water plan was adopted. Without funding, we have been lucky to stay active. I don't know what the funding is for the Water Assembly but the Council of Governments Water Resources Board received no state water planning funds throughout this period. Basically it has been a volunteer effort with participation from the local governments.

There are other water resource activities that have been done by the Council of Governments. Bosque restoration in the Middle Rio Grande Valley has involved hundreds of acres of removal of non-native plants and trees. Those projects are ongoing and they are intended to result in the reduction in water loss in those areas as well as wildfire protection. The Water Resources Board is trying to do more regional oriented activities. One of the concerns recently expressed to the Board was the need to establish regional water conservation standards. We have a four-county area in the Council of Governments and it includes two regional water planning areas: the Middle Rio Grande and Estancia Basins. Some of these activities are easy to do. An example is that we are considering a standard time of day period such as 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. for restricting outdoor watering that is consistent throughout the area.

We are currently working on an application to submit to the Water Trust Board for funding to purchase and install toilets for a toilet retrofit program. Albuquerque and Rio Rancho have had toilet rebate programs and Albuquerque's is still active. A rebate program is for homeowners to replace an older toilet, say pre-1950, or one that uses more than an ultra-low flush toilet which is about 1.5 or 1.7 gallons per flush and receive a credit on their water bill. Bernalillo County however is actually contracting someone to locate homeowners in the county area who would qualify for replacement of a water hog toilet. Then they would work out an agreement to come in and pull and replace the old toilet. We have done some calculations, and the water savings can be significant. In our application to the Water Trust Board we are proposing to retrofit over 1000 toilets.

So whether we get the funding or not, Albuquerque and Bernalillo County are still replacing water wasting toilets; and what we want to do is spread that program out regionally so that we can get toilet retrofits in outlying rural areas. I will end here and answer questions later.