

WOMEN'S VIEWPOINT ON OUR STATE WATER PROBLEMS

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When I was asked to speak to you on this subject, my first thought was that there would be very little I could say because most of my water problems have been related to ranch management. However, when I go rid of the forest, I could see the trees and realized that much can be said from the women's viewpoint.

First, let me say that we believe we do have a very good state water law even though people sometimes disagree on the administration and interpretation of the law.

We are interested, primarily, in the health and welfare of our families and since water problems are economic problems, they definitely have a direct bearing on our health and welfare. Concerning sanitation and cleanliness, I shall only say that we are glad for progress that has given us modern plumbing...but I am sure that the world is till full of little boys who wish that it weren't so convenient for mom to say, "Wash up Johnny, and be sure to get your ears clean."

Basically, there are two water problems and all the others stem from these which are, "too much" or "too little".

Let's discuss "too much" first, even though it is hard for us in arid New Mexico to visualize "too much". (You know what floods can do to any area and how detrimental they are to health, welfare and the economy of the locality as well as the country as a whole.) Last summer, a small residential area outside of Deming was flooded...along with the other problems it also contaminated the one well that serviced the area and made it unfit for human consumption for several weeks. (Undoubtedly, it is the responsibility of the states and federal government to do something about these conditions when major rivers are involved)...but is it their responsibility when areas such as the one in Deming, floods in Albuquerque and other places happen? Or should the real estate company that develops the land have the responsibility?

It might be well if the prospective homeowner would be more careful when he buys land, to purchase only in an area that is protected. This might decide the issue of "responsibility".

Then we have "too little" or the threat of "too little" available water which definitely effects the urban as well as the rural family. It seems that about the only time the urban family realizes there is a shortage of water is when they are advised to water the lawn at stated times...but their economy is directly or indirectly effected. However, it is quite different with the rural family. Heavy pumping, in conjested areas, along with prolonged drouth, may case the water table to be lowered which causes added

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expense in drilling supplemental wells or deepening the old one. Along with this original expense, it means higher monthly power bills and can upset the whole economy of the farming operation...using money that might otherwise have been spent for better housing, medical or dental care or education, insurance and other items necessary to health and welfare.

We must use all available water if agriculture and industry are to be developed to their potential...this makes for better schools, better communities and happier homes...but over-use can be more harmful than under-use in an irrigated area just as drought effects the economy in non-irrigated areas. Perhaps there may be plenty of water farther down but until we get a cheaper form of energy to utilize that water, it can be economically infeasible to obtain it. Supplies can be exhausted.

Water is our most precious natural resource. Substitutes have been found for most of the others but I do not see a substitute for water in the foreseeable future.

Population is increasing very rapidly in our state. Much of the increase is due to defense projects. We are concerned about "land grabs" by the federal government. We are aware that, so far, where additional water is needed for these projects, the government has purchased existing water rights...but what if a time comes when no one has any for sale and the government needs them? Can the Office of the State Engineer continue to protect our rights if the government decides water is needed more for defense than agriculture and industry? Several years ago, I spent several weeks in Newfoundland where the U. S. was in the process of building a defense plant. Federal personnel and people from other parts of Newfoundland had more than doubled the population of the small town practically overnight. Newfoundland is a backward country compared to ours and there was no central water system in the community but families were dependent on their own wells for water. Their normal rainfall is sixty inches a year but because of the added consumption of water, many wells had either gone dry or were going dry. This is food for thought when we compare our expected normal rainfall of nine to twelve inches to their sixty.

As lay-persons, we are not qualified to know all the answers to our water problems...but as citizens, we must be alert to them and be certain that we continue to have qualified people in office who can and will safeguard this most vital resource and that the responsibility for decisions is properly placed whether it belongs to the individual, state or federal government.