

WATER CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE
FARMINGTON AREA AND IN THE STATE

Governor Tom Bolack^{1/}

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I think after that introduction I should just say - thank you, it is nice to be here, and return to my seat. I do appreciate the introduction.

Very little of what I have to say will be on the technical side, as is the tone of most of this conference. I will discuss some observations I have made in many of the places I have been and many of the things I have had contact with, both in this state and abroad. In view of some questions which may be asked later, I will leave the door open in several spots. I will try to summarize a few thoughts that are most important to me and might leave a little food for thought, and perhaps give another reason of why you dedicated people are here for this conference.

I do feel very keenly about multiple use of land and water, of course, because I think too often we have gotten on to one version or the other without any thought of what the other needs might be. Certainly in our operation at Farmington we are trying to prove the compatibility of production as well as having a recreational benefit, together with game animals, fish and wild birds. We have considered the impact created on the public domain lands and the federal parks, state parks, and the need for space. Most everything we hear about space today is about the moon and all of the outer space, but actually there is a great need for space for people to move about and enjoy life. I think this particular situation is going to increase. There is greater push to the outdoors, and a greater demand on nature and a greater demand on what we do with our lands. In New Mexico we do little with our land without connecting it with water. So, maybe I will talk about land more than water, but I mean one and the same because we do have to keep them together. I think one mistake that has been made in this state, a very serious mistake, is that many people who are speculating on our lands, even our state land, have done nothing to preserve or improve or even keep those lands the same. I am not against the free enterprise system, which I have evidenced in several ways, but I think that people should be encouraged to do something with the land to better it, whether they plant trees, or whether they plant legumes, or grass, or something else to keep it from eroding away, filling our rivers and lakes with silt and not really benefiting anybody. I definitely think we have a long way to go in this respect. Unfortunately many of those speculators don't even live in our state much less contribute anything to the beauty or future of it. I think we have a great ceiling over our head, which we might say is the amount of available water, especially in the West

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and certainly our great state of New Mexico. Today we talk about the irrigation and we talk about the water used for crops and that is the battle of today. Tomorrow we will have this plus how good the quality is and how much will be available for people to actually drink. I think that shortage will be most serious. I think there is a great deal of merit in going to northern basins for transfers, and even into Canada to look for additional water. It might well be Canada, because they have such a surplus of water that one day through a greater compact may be made available. The expense at this time seems completely astronomical and out of reach. However, when people are thirsty enough, certainly those equations will change.

I cannot give you the exact figure but no one can deny that the whole and total use of the land will create an economic boost to New Mexico's economy. This is particularly true in the north. We hear lots about the north's problems. The main reason is that most of those little fields that grew chili and beans some decades ago are growing up to weeds now and the owners are on welfare, or somewhere else. This has had a great impact on our state's economy. If that land was all put back even as it was two decades ago, it would solve a lot of our problems up north. The true value of the land is a great question. We can get hundreds of dollars, and in some cases thousands of dollars for land in New Mexico, but what is the true value? What if we were to accumulate the amount of revenue or resource, or food, or way of life, however you want to weigh it, that has been produced say from one acre of land in the Holy Land over the last 2,000 years, what is the accumulated value? Perhaps we should think of that sometimes. Sometimes we might be a bit short-sighted when some present promoter or subdivider comes along with a price that seems too good to turn down. A subdivider has been sort of a target of mine. Living in a stream valley in San Juan Basin is much the same as it is around Albuquerque and the Rio Grande. The presently developed land and water is a little closer in and easier to build a mass subdivision, or an industrial subdivision, or building any other development. The very fertile land has been taken out of cultivation, when adjacent to these developed lands are rolling hills which actually once landscaped would probably make a more beautiful city and certainly a better place for many people to live and operate. Yet, for a little bit of short-sightedness, or perhaps other reasons I am not in a position to discuss, many of our fertile lands are now completely gone from any contributing factor as far as land use is concerned in producing crops. We may well regret that before it is all over, because there are millions of acres lost to highways, airports and subdivisions with no consideration of the land use, or the land needs on down the road. We talk about our surpluses which are nonexistent any more and certainly with the population explosion throughout the world we may well starve before we are blown off the face of the earth with bombs.

I speak from many of the things I have seen in Africa and India where the soil is gone, completely gone to bedrock. No atomic energy or irrigation projects, or anything else will bring that land back. This scorched earth policy of burning off all the brush, grass and humus year by year, plus overgrazing, plus poor management, has completely left the land devoid of any fertility and in turn when the vegetation was gone it was only a few short years until the soil eroded away into the existing lakes, rivers, or to the ocean.

Certainly, water development is something that is hard to sell. Steve Reynolds touched on it previously. I well remember the Upper Colorado River project. By some chance I was representing the four states, the four upper basin states, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming and New Mexico. We had a real fine project. We were all convinced it was a great thing. We went to Washington with a couple of movies, a few bushel baskets of folders and maps and thought there was really nothing to it, and it would be a very fine thing and everybody would be for it. We had barely unpacked our bags when we found out that half of the people in San Juan County and a lot of the people in the state of New Mexico - and this was true of other states - right back home in our own backyards were against the very project we were trying to sell. We then came back home to complete the home work. We went back again and after a great deal of effort the Upper Colorado River, the first project, was finally authorized. But it is amazing how little the average layman in the state, even as important as water is to New Mexico, can really comprehend or appreciate, in the beginning at least. I am certainly not here as an expert. I have not attended one of these meetings before. During the time spent back there in Washington I continued to find out a lot more about the water question and to realize how deep and technical it really is and how many facets there really are. Many people did not understand how important it was then, and I wonder if they do now.

While I am on the subject, I would have to say that if I had to list two men in this nation who had anything to do with our state's position, at least on the water problem, I would have to say in all fairness that General Dwight D. Eisenhower was one and our senior senator, Clinton P. Anderson, was the other. I know of no reclamation project that was the doing of either side of the political aisle alone. Unquestionably, it was a joint effort -- people from all walks of life and from both sides of the aisle. I can only speak very highly of Senator Clinton P. Anderson because I was there some 24 months out of a three-year period and saw what actually went on.

I would like to talk a little about our actual operation at Farmington. Again I am not in a position to give you the actual second-feet or the acre-feet. We feel that some three acre-feet per acre per year is probably sufficient in our area, but we do not have the growing season that you have down here. We probably accomplished proving a lot of things that it is not wise to do, and hopefully a few that are wise to do with irrigation in our project up there. We certainly made our

share of mistakes. One thing that I would say, and I am sure is well known by most of you people, is the fact that irrigation methods are very important, particularly with vegetables; we grow a hundred non-surplus crops, which puts us into all of the squash and pumpkins, and every kind of vegetable except cotton and peanuts. A former governor takes care of that. We have found that because of the shallow root limitation of many of the vegetables, and because of our sandy and even more sandy subsoil, that if we irrigate twice as often and half as much, we seem to get a lot better yield.

We have had a surplus of water available in the San Juan area for years. It seems to me, and God love them all, and I am not picking on my neighbors, but it seems that many operate on the old theory that "if a little water is good a whole lot is better". I believe of any place in our state San Juan probably claims the record of over-irrigation. Most of the well-meaning people over-irrigate and leach the fertility beyond the reach of the shallow roots and the result is that our carrots seem to be always a little bit bigger and our pumpkins produce higher yields. We irrigate often and not much at one time. Just enough to get it across the land, and again not leach our fertility beyond the reach of the roots. We made a lot of mistakes and as I say we probably could tell you a lot of the things not to do rather than so many of what you should do. We have made a real effort in trying to help the Navajos be prepared for their project when it becomes a reality.

Our seasons vary a great deal. We have tried as many as 21 varieties of one particular onion strain. We thought we had the answer, but with all respect to our college here and to other research, the season changed and what we thought was so good was terrible. We do have an erratic season which many times throws off what we think is a conclusion. Our management of crops, reforestation, game management, even to predator control, we feel has contributed a great deal to the beauty and still maintained the productivity of the land and land use. Again, it goes back to the fact that it doesn't hurt for anyone to look at it or enjoy it. It doesn't hurt for a lake to be full of fish, either, or for people to enjoy it. There is a lot that can be done - leaving the fence rows and improving game cover and feed. Of course, as you concentrate game - we very dearly learned a lesson that it will concentrate the predators, some of them two-legged, too. This is just something you learn the hard way. We shot the hoot owls because they were eating the pheasants and guinea fowls and others off the roosts; then the field mice girdled many of the trees in the orchard and I lost some fruit trees that were 30 years old. You cannot interfere with nature without paying the price and sometimes it is pretty dear.

I do believe that a lesson of life can be learned by all of us from nature and the out-of-doors. I also feel very keenly that very few of our world problems today actually stem from people who have had, or still have, their feet in the soil. You will find few of those creating our serious problems and making the adverse headlines in the world, either now or ever, who had their feet in the soil for very long.

I do want to extend each and every one of you an invitation to come to Farmington and see our operation. If you have been there before, you will certainly be welcome again. We keep trying to build on, and prove some things right and some other things wrong.

It has been a pleasure for me to be before this group. I realize I have rambled a great deal but hope I have left a few thoughts with you that are important. I do congratulate you for your interest in water, and your part in making this occasion possible, and your feeling about water which I think is one of the greatest and most important problems which faces our state and the whole southwest at this time.

Thank you.