

"WATER IN THE FUTURE:
208 PLANNING AND YOU"

J. Paul Comola
Assistant Regional Administrator
for Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations

You all are to be congratulated for rekindling every year since the mid-fifties a deep and intelligent interest in water resources in the State of New Mexico.

I am particularly pleased to join you this year in discussing the process by which you and other citizens will help forge the strategy for assuring that by 1983 your waterways will be clean enough for swimming and will be teaming with fish.

Water quality and water quantity are closely related. And because your water supply is limited, you have wisely been most concerned about both. Your ground water quality standards, I understand, were the first in the nation to be adopted.

Against this background, then, the future of the 208 planning process looks bright in New Mexico.

When Congress passed Public Law 92-500 in 1972, it recognized that the talents and imagination of both state and local governments would be needed to deal with water pollution. Moreover, it recognized that if the citizens were going to support those projects eventually tagged as essential in cleaning the water, they must be meaningfully involved in the identification of problems and in the selection of alternate solutions from the start of the planning process. After all, citizens are the ones who will "vote the question" on water pollution controls -- directly in bond issues or indirectly through their local officials and the budgetary process.

You have heard this morning the status of 208 planning from several perspectives, giving added dimensions to current activities -- Jim Agee and the Environmental Protection Agency; Cathy Callahan and the Environmental Improvement Agency in Santa Fe; Bob Bishop and the National Resource Conservation Commission in Albuquerque.

Perhaps now we can indulge in the intellectual luxury of looking at the philosophical issues surrounding the process of planning on such a large scale.

1. The environmental movement as we know it is a relatively new phenomenon arising out of widespread public demand. Yet, we mustn't think for a minute that concern for the environment is new to our generation. The first White House Conference of Governors -- in the year 1910 -- included a record of agreement "that the beauty, healthfulness and habitability of our country should be preserved and increased." The Governors' report continued, "It is much to be regretted that officials of the conservation movement -- that which nothing is more important in this country -- have never shown a cordial, much less an aggressive interest in safeguarding our great scenery on the one hand or in gaining an economic understanding of development on the other."

The Report Card on our generation's effectiveness in managing the environment is not good. Early this year the Columbus, Ohio Dispatch reported results of a survey of 200 Central Ohio students. The poll revealed that 33 percent of the elementary, junior high and high school students questioned believe that Americans are seriously trying to eliminate pollution: The other 67 percent said the causes of pollution are not being vigorously attacked.

One elementary schoolboy wrote, "Some people are trying to get rid of pollution. But some aren't and it is easier to make pollution than to get rid of it."

2. The determination of problems and selection of alternate solutions based on scientific data are to be made by the many publics. If nothing else, the Congressional mandate for broad public participation in the baseline studies and project planning processes for 208 water programs has brought -- and is bringing -- many professional environmental "Alices" back from what many citizens perceive as the Wonderland of Bureaucratic Isolation.

No longer can those of us who develop strategies, implement plans and enforce regulations designed to restore and assure the continuance or plentiful and high quality national water resources perform our tasks without the continuing involvement of -- and accountability to -- not only the Congress, but, importantly, also to those general and specific publics which may be impacted by our research, interpretations and actions ... impacted economically, aesthetically, emotionally or physically.

Not only must we hear the voices of each of these publics, but we must listen. From the perspective of the Environmental Protection Agency, and from our individual perspectives, it is important that we listen with the same care to the voices of our adversaries as we do to the voices of our advocates. It is not sufficient for us to seek out -- and identify with -- only the scientist, the government administrator and the environmental activist. The law clearly compels us to identify, seek out, communicate with and receive feedback from the broadest possible range of citizens. (Bankers, contractors, non-public decision-makers, real estate investors and developers, utilities, industrial and tourist development agencies, chambers of commerce, city managers, reporters and analysts from all public mediums.) These are just a few of the many

publics we must reach. Certainly, the engineer, the public works specialist, the state, regional and local planning bodies and public interest groups which are oriented to the environment are essential publics for input, analysis and feedback. But we must reach out in a substantially more organized manner to assure general public involvement in our planning process for 208 programs.

3. The planning process as devised involves all levels of government. The areawide planning process was devised to help communities develop action programs for dealing with their local water pollution problems.

It begins when a State Governor designates a statewide or a regional agency to oversee planning in a designated area. As you all know, the Environmental Improvement Agency is responsible in New Mexico for 208 planning. The Environmental Protection Agency has made grants nationwide, funding totaled \$216 million, going to 49 states and 174 designated areas. New Mexico's share was \$1,038,000 with an additional \$352,000 coming from state matching funds.

Contracts have been let, then, by the EIA in Santa Fe to consulting firms, an area COG, originally to the Navajo Nation, to members of the academic community, and other governmental agencies in gathering data for developing a strategy.

4. Planning for clean water must come to grips with questions of future growth and with planned use of the land, public and private. As a nation we have been going through a long and difficult debate over patterns of growth and whether or not there should be some direction given by governmental bodies to that growth. The historic approach is that free enterprise prevails. People are free to use their property the way they please, and growth occurs wherever anyone so chooses. Against that has been a recognition of irreversible damage to the environment that can result from unrestricted growth.

People are grappling for the answers -- answers that can come only from debate between parties who share a mutual respect for the opposing viewpoint.

5. The groundwork being developed for a national strategy from identification of the problem to implementation of the solution may well serve as a model for other major concerns of national scope. Materials and techniques being prepared now have potential application to most other government/public programs: Conduct of a meeting, use of the media, identification of publics, resolution of conflict. Inter-relationship of the federal agency (EPA) with state and local planning agencies and governmental bodies is a new affirmation of the decentralization of the federal government with major responsibilities resting outside Washington and the regional offices.

In many types of planning, the planners do their thing and the rest of society goes ahead and does its thing, and there is no connection between the two. Moreover, the carefully drawn plans take their place among others on a dusty shelf.

In 208 we have some unusual advantages for trying to crack through this historic problem. We can see the mistakes that have been made. Our statutory authority places a special emphasis on implementation. It also authorizes enough money to provide proper leverage if used wisely. We believe this time the combination of factors will work!

6. Planning for clean water involves other environmental programs within the Environmental Protection Agency: Solid waste, drinking water, air, noise, radiation, pesticides. The pollution washed out of the air by rains contributes to water pollution in the streams and urban runoffs. The pesticide programs utilized on farmlands provide a source for non-point pollution of streams. The mining of radioactive materials in your Grants Mineral Belt has a definite impact on the water quality in that area.

My challenge to you today is that we together begin by understanding the principles involved and the programs proposed. Together we can develop alternate solutions to solve various problems involved in creating a clean and productive environment. We know that right here -- as well as in those forums in which public participation will subsequently take place -- there will be conflict. Where conflict exists, there is opportunity for learning and progress if we properly manage it.

Let us turn conflict into a positive force for planning and executing a plan for water quality that is consistent with good technical and economic management without compromising scientific and aesthetic principles.