

## WATER PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

I imagine that nobody here doubts the existence of a close relationship between water resources and economic development, and their inseparability in any comprehensive planning that involves either. However, somewhat less agreement might exist among us as to what economic development implications follow from a particular outlook for water resources. And, too, quite spirited debates have been known to spring up over some essentially non-economic effects -- cultural and other "life-style" values come to mind -- of various water resource use alternatives.

Is usable water in New Mexico diminishing such that economic development is likely to be foreclosed in the future? Probably not. Though that answer is not premised on the possibility, "development" could lead to making brackish ground water usable; the quantity held in New Mexico is equivalent to about 2,000 years' flow of the Rio Grande.

In economic terms, a typical unit of usable water in New Mexico is becoming more expensive. Some believe that other social costs will rise as water use changes, for example, changes associated with transferring water from the small farm to an urban water system

What are some of the water supply costs, leaving social values aside, that must be reckoned with in planning for economic development?

- Protection or remediation of water quality. It is a generally accepted premise that protection costs less than remediation. What is not so clear in each instance, and what water and economic development planners need to include in the pictures they create, "Who pays and when?" The user who is compelled to discharge clean water won't readily agree that it is less costly for him than for a downstream user (or the government!) to remediate his pollution.

This is especially true if the remediation expenditure is to be deferred.

- Diversion and transportation systems. Ours is not the first civilization to enjoy the perceived benefits of transporting substantial quantities of water long distances. It is likely that ever-grander systems will come into use in the future; before they do, one may be sure that significant economic development planning will have been involved.
- Conservation practices. Limiting water use to necessary minimums is not the only meaning of the term "conservation." Return flow systems are another example, but they imply the additional cost of transportation back to a water source.

Most of you are aware that Governor Carruthers initiated a five-year economic development planning process, and that a draft plan has now been submitted to him. He has also appointed an economic development and tourism commission, charged, among other things, with reviewing and approving this plan and providing subsequent annual updates. Preparation of the current draft plan included a good deal of public participation. Views and ideas were solicited from a wide variety of individuals and groups. The commission will now broaden that public participation by conducting meetings around the state, open to full public participation.

I assure you that the draft plan, while a great beginning, needs considerable additional work. For example, there are gaping holes where highly important subjects are lightly discussed or omitted altogether. Water is one of those subjects. I believe the entire discussion of water consumes only two-thirds of one page in a 99-page document! Worse yet, the document submits as fact the following rather dubious claim: "Recent studies indicate that the demand for water-based recreation is nearly

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insatiable and therein lies the greatest economic value for the state's water supply." I don't mean to minimize the pleasure or value of water-based recreation, but "greatest economic value" might seem to some an exaggeration. Omissions and exaggerations in policy statements lead to bad public action. We need your help in fine-tuning this New Mexico five-year economic development plan, so I hope you will request copies from my office. Read and think about it, at least the parts in which you have interest and expertise, and participate in the public meeting process that will make the document truly useful to you and your state government.