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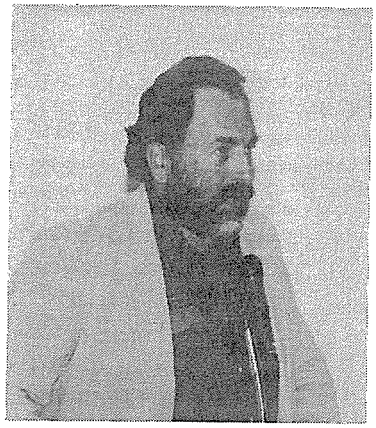

THE DANGERS OF WATER PLANNING IN ISOLATION: A NORTHERN NEW MEXICO PERSPECTIVE

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I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak to you this morning. The organization I represent is the Mora Water and Land Protective Association. It is a countywide organization concerned with water and land issues. We emphasize water *and* land because, for those of us in Mora County, water does not go without the land.

The water planning process has been instrumental in educating many of us from Mora and San Miguel about water issues, although planning is only one of many important water issues. For many of us, water and land have always been issues of life and death. Our history will substantiate that claim.

To provide you with my background, I am executive director of the Mora Valley Community Health Services, a community owned and operated medical and health services organization. I helped Mora County residents unite to organize our own health and medical services. Currently, we provide six different services: medical, ambulance, dental, home health, home care and community health. Community health is our most recent service initiated primarily because of our cultural and traditional concerns for community health care.

Another active organization in northern New Mexico, and of which I am a part, is the Siete del Norte Community Development Corporation, a community development corporation begun in the 1970s, which remains alive and well in six counties in northern New Mexico. This organization is 70 percent controlled by elderly, low-income people from those six counties. Hispanic low-income elderly persons in their 70s and 80s are actually taking part in operating community development programs. That speaks to a cultural tradition that our elders are respected and remain active in our communities. Those of us who are middle-aged and younger are aware of the role our elders play and will follow in their footsteps.

Another organization instrumental in providing reflection and analysis is the Regional Planning and Development Group, comprised of seven counties, five in northern New Mexico and two in southern Colorado. The group is not only active in planning but also in addressing development needs. Planning cannot and should not be done in isolation. Much of what we hear in terms of water planning is reflective, in isolation with no context. However we all know that the context of water planning these days is economic need, and in some instances it is economic greed. The Regional Planning and Development Group represents natural, social, historical, traditional, and geographic regions including two southern Colorado counties. For those of

us who are natives of northern New Mexico, the two Colorado counties are culturally part of New Mexico and it is natural for them to be a part of the group.

A fourth organization is the Rio Grande Institute. The institute not only encompasses New Mexico but the southwestern United States. This organization is unique in that it is an effort by Native Americans and Hispanics along the Rio Grande to share with each other sacred memories, memories of ancient ways and truths. The Rio Grande refers not only to a geographic area but to the entire southwestern culture that grew from the river. The Rio Grande Institute deals academically and intellectually with many issues confronting us today, but remains very grounded and rooted in our ancient, sacred past.

Those of us involved in the Mora/San Miguel water plan have two or three specific recommendations from the plan to share with you. These recommendations emphasize the important role the acequia associations played in the planning process. I quote from the plan.

> It is recommended that local governments recognize the historical, cultural and economic importance of irrigated agriculture in the community ditch associations to the region and work toward preserving the acequias. It is recommended that local governments consider a policy of restricting the development of irrigated lands to preserve the historical and cultural integrity of the acequias to the region. It is recommended that all irrigators beneficially use their water rights on a yearly basis to insure that their water rights are preserved. It is recommended that the community ditch associations encourage their members to refrain from building on or developing irrigated lands to avoid abandoning productive farmlands. It is recommended that community ditch associations be aware of any proposed transfers of water rights by any of its members and if necessary file protests of the transfer on the grounds that such transfers are inconsistent with the public welfare because it would destroy a traditional agricultural way of life and would be a part of a distinct pattern of destruction of the local culture.

We dared to take water planning and tie it to our history, traditions and culture. At the beginning of our discussions, we debated about whether it was appropriate to include our history as part of the water planning process. We later discovered that, although not by statute, but by policy and rule, our culture is a very acceptable part of the process. Some of us would not have participated if this were not the case. The process required negotiations making the whole planning process alive and dynamic.

> It is recommended that acequia associations consider participating in organizations such as the New Mexico Acequia Association.

The other important issue that I was asked to share concerns the issue of water transfers. The transfers issue is very important to us because it has to do with our whole tradition and history—where we come from, where we are, and where we are going. Although the dominant western society believes that planning and progress are linear, many of us do not agree. We reflect a more eastern way of life that begins at a center, goes out from the center and returns to that center. Water transfers are very threatening to us, to the very fiber of who we are. Transfers mean in a very real sense, the elimination of who we have been, who we are—it robs us of the opportunity of being and continuing to be.

Transfers from agricultural to nonagricultural, commercial and industrial uses are very threatening to us. The transfer of surface water to underground water also is a very important planning issue. A good example of very bad water planning and development is the proposed federal Mora Fish Hatchery and Technology Center. We are totally opposed to this project because of many of the issues I have presented today.

Another issue of concern is bioregionalism. "Bio" means "life," all of life, the totality of life. Bioregionalism means that we plan taking into account all of the natural elements of life in relationship with each other—not only water, but earth, wind, and fire as well. Not to do this is to plan superficially with the intent to isolate one element, such as water in this case, to exploit that element for economic and materialistic purposes. Let's challenge ourselves to plan bioregionally. It is necessary to our survival and our quality of life depends on it. By quality of life, I am not referring to a better standard of living in America. We are part of a global village in which many of the villagers are people of color, traditional people who remain tied to their traditional past largely because of their oppression and exploitation by developed countries. To be participants in a global village, we must plan from a bioregional perspective.

Several years ago, through the Regional Planning and Development Group, I coined an expression to describe the planning and development process for our native villages: *"De abajo para arriba, y de adentro para afuera."* Or, "Development is from the bottom up, and from the inside out." So what you have is not a linear misconception again, from the bottom up. When you plan from the inside out, you establish a center, an intersect. When you begin a process, you first complement what is already there, because it does not belong to you. Respect for the past is required as the basis for tomorrow. Next, you supplement what already is present. Thus, first in the planning process is to respect and complement what is there, in this case, the Native Americans, Hispanics, acequias, cultural beliefs, traditions, and superstitions. Respect for a holy consciousness in the area is necessary. We are not an ignorant people, we are not only bean eaters. For centuries we have been plagued because many of you are ignorant of who we are. Dealing from the inside out is the only way to maintain control. Native Americans and Hispanics in New Mexico need to be in control of their destiny. We must control development and our resources. Otherwise, speculators and developers will obtain our resources. They will buy us out, and once they own the resources, they will be in control.

I am going to conclude and summarize my remarks by sharing a couple of sayings about ancient truths. From the ancient Jewish civilization, Jeremiah exhorts his people,

> Stand at the crossroads and ask for the ancient ways, wherein is the good life, and walk therein and find rest for your soul.

Notice the action verbs—stand, ask, walk and find! This is valuable wisdom and advice for our day. Mr. Martinez, our state engineer, stated earlier in his remarks that we are in transition when it comes to water planning in our state. We are at a crossroads when it comes to management and allocation of water for the future. Let us ask for the ancient ways wherein is the good life and walk in them and find rest for our lives.

The second ancient saying we need to keep foremost in our minds as we plan our water resources is,

> *Un pueblo que obvida su pasado, corre el riesgo de volver a repitir sus errores.*
> A people who forget their past run the risk of repeating its same mistakes.