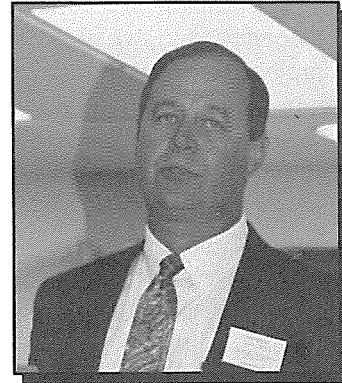


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JOINING FORCES: THE PECOS RIVER NATIVE RIPARIAN ORGANIZATION

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Conflict resolution, building consensus, and forging partnerships are as old as mankind. In the last 100 years, we have made tremendous technological advances in communications, transportation, and manufacturing, but I do not know whether we have ever made any significant gains in managing human conflict. There may be nothing new to say about human beings sitting down and resolving conflicts. Our predecessors probably agonized over the same stumbling blocks we have today in dealing with one another and working out our common problems. Keep in mind that you are dealing with people's values when sitting down to resolve conflicts and build consensus. Dealing with people's values and ideals is more delicate than dealing with their money or homes. Wars are fought over differences in values and ideals.

People can become very emotional when dealing with water issues. Oftentimes the most vocal parties, the most interested, and the most difficult to deal with, are the parties least affected, live the farthest away, and do not have a direct stake in the issue. But because we are tinkering with people's ideals, they become very committed and vocal although they are the least affected. In the future, maybe through genetic engineering, we could implant a gene in people that would enable them to work out conflict and build consensus. That may never be possible, but it seems some people have the genetic ability to be mean spirited, negative, and have a natural ability to evoke conflict and chaos. I have met a few of those people.

We have a project in Carlsbad along the Pecos River in which I have been involved for about three years. The Pecos River Native

Riparian Project is proceeding well although it is sometimes frustrating and slow. We have learned much from this project that we certainly did not know at its inception and we will continue to learn as the project unfolds. I am not going to tell you anything new or revolutionary today but I may put a different twist on many of the things you have heard here already.

The Pecos River has a long history of floods, water shortages and high salt concentrations. In 1942, the National Resource Planning Board, which I assume is the forerunner of this administration's new National Biological Survey Department within the Department of Interior, made this observation:

For its size the Pecos River presents a greater aggregation of problems associated with land and water use than any other irrigated basin in the western United States.

That has not changed since 1942. In fact, the Pecos' problems are more complicated today than ever before because of additional players with their own values tied into managing the river. Further complicating the situation are the many laws influencing how the river is managed. That means there are more conflicts and more meetings with more individuals attempting to build consensus and forge ahead while trying to protect the Pecos River basin.

Many current problems are the result of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Texas v. New Mexico*. The Supreme Court amended the 1947 compact and placed stringent requirements on the state of New Mexico to deliver water to Texas. The new Texas water commissioner is here today and that is evidence of how both states have become more interested in learning about the other. For years, I have gone to meetings such as this and have never seen the Texas commissioner present.

I will describe briefly the Pecos River Native Riparian Project and give you some principles that we have discovered as we have struggled along with this project. The Pecos River in New Mexico is over-appropriated because the flow is not constant; it is either dry

or flooding. The river is so undependable that it is impossible to predict the yield from one year to the next.

Since the early 1940s, salt cedar has been a water user on the Pecos River. It is a phreato-phyte that lives in the river basins, uses a tremendous amount of water that could be used beneficially in some other manner, crowds out all other vegetation and eventually becomes 100 percent stands. Much time and effort has been spent concerning this unappropriated water use since the early days of the Pecos River compact, and little progress has been made. A federal project in the Pecos River Basin began in the mid-1960s and was aimed at eradicating the plants using mechanical means. However, at the end of the project, there remained tens of thousands of acres of salt cedar in the basin.

The Pecos River Native Riparian Organization believes that by controlling this plant and re-establishing native vegetation, we not only will bring back the native vegetation and wildlife, but we will free-up some water in the basin which will benefit New Mexico, the residents of the basin, and Texas. These projects normally are conducted by federal or state agencies. In the last 40 years we have become dependent on the federal or state government doing things for us. In this case, we are taking a different approach. Our group of impassioned volunteers have organized to resolve this issue. Initially, we were not funded, which is unusual for this type of project. We also had no experience in lobbying or fund-raising, but we felt we needed to do something. We enlisted some very good people and formed a nonprofit corporation to carry out a demonstration project to control salt cedar and re-establish native vegetation.

The project area is located directly along the west side of the river, south and east of Artesia and comprises six-thousand acres of private land. To control the salt cedar, we will use an integrated program of mechanical means and herbicides. We will re-establish the native riparian vegetation and monitor any water yielded from controlling the salt cedar and the effects on wildlife.

Joining Forces: The Pecos River Native Riparian Organization

The nonprofit organization is made up of four soil and water conservation districts; Carlsbad Soil and Water Conservation District, Central Valley Soil and Water Conservation District, Peñasco Soil and Water Conservation District, and Dexter/Hagerman Soil and Water Conservation District. The Pecos Valley Artesian Conservation District and Carlsbad Irrigation District also are members. Each entity has a representative on the board of directors, and I am chairman.

As time passes I think we are becoming more astute. Next to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, I do not know of a project that has more built-in conflicts and problems than we have encountered here. It certainly seems like an insurmountable task sometimes.

We are looking for a state-of-the-art, economical, effective, efficient method to control salt cedar. Two new-age herbicides have been developed that do the job very satisfactorily. However, some people have strong sentiments opposing the use of herbicides to control the salt cedar. They are able to construct roadblocks in different ways to hinder the project. Our group has learned to do several things. We have attempted to solicit participation from all concerned parties, not just affected parties. It is easy to find affected parties, but finding all concerned parties, especially those who may provide the strongest opposition, is more difficult. Those parties may have inherent values and concerns about the project even though they might be the least affected or not affected personally at all.

Once you locate all parties, it is best to obtain their input from the very beginning. I think we have done a tremendous job in including everyone, and it has not been easy. One recommendation I have is that you do not confront initially big conflicts such as the use of herbicides for controlling salt cedar. Do not start a dialogue by arguing that issue. First try to find common ground, interests, and goals. Discover that on which everyone agrees and build from that commonality. Reinforce those agreements and goals, and establish some basic principles, such as in our case, controlling the salt cedar.

I have not found anyone who disagrees that salt cedar is a problem given the vast densities we have in our area. Everyone seems to agree salt cedar is a problem and it would be better if native vegetation and wildlife lived in our area in the density and numbers that once existed and if the water table would return to previous levels.

Those are basic issues that everyone agrees on, therefore it would seem as if it would be relatively easy to carry out this project, but not so. We tried to build consensus slowly on mutually agreeable topics like revegetation and monitoring the effects of the control program. We will leave the biggest hurdle until last, although throughout the process the herbicide issue has been discussed.

During the process, we continued to stress the safety of the herbicides we are considering for the project. Herbicide company representatives have disseminated information concerning herbicide labels and testing procedures. We have tried to be as up-front as possible because we know the final debate on the use of herbicides is looming ahead. It is a fact that the project could come to a complete stop because of disagreement over herbicides use. We are not out of the woods on this yet.

Another issue we have had to confront is people's fears. Whether the fear is real or perceived, to the person perceiving the problem, it is as real as if it were a fact. You must keep that in mind. You may have to deal with someone whose concerns seem utterly ridiculous with no basis, but in their mind these concerns are as real as if they were based in fact. Again, we are dealing with people's ideals and values, and you can not expect people to change these overnight. Sometimes you just learn how to work around their concerns by building consensus.

Throughout this process, we had to focus on our objectives, learn to communicate, educate, persuade, recruit, and to be flexible and positive. We learned to listen and continuously recruited people to reinforce our passions. If you do not have a passion for a project such as this, it is easy to get discouraged, and you must project your fervor in order to promote the project to others.

It is important, then, to expand your contacts, build a support base and recruit high quality people. Keep the commitment level high, although often it is hard to sustain. Our members do not get paid so it is their passion for the project that gets things accomplished. Also you can bet that your opposition feels every bit as impassioned and committed as you do.

At the onset, we did not know much about fund raising or public relations. We have learned that you must work on public relations by building grassroots public support. We are out beating the drum continuously to maintain and win new support. Grassroots public support converts to political support. Political support converts to funding support. We are not funded adequately, but we are making progress. Simultaneously, we have tried to build consensus with interested groups or individuals. If interested groups are not at least partially committed, they can derail the funding process very quickly. Even with grassroots support, some opposing organizations are very adept at lobbying politicians, and we have found that these organizations can very easily stifle your funding efforts. I think we are going to have our project adequately funded within another year.

A few rules have emerged from our experiences on this project.

- Always maintain credibility.
- Keep your commitment level high.
- Stay focused on your objectives, yet keep an open mind to new ideas.
- Sit down with and listen to other groups' perspectives. Much can be adapted from others' positions particularly if it helps win their support.
- Build common ground by emphasizing common gains to be derived from the project.
- Deal with conflicting issues one at a time.
- Respect the ideas and concerns of those with whom you are trying to reach consensus. If treated with disrespect, you will not receive any commitment from them.

- Avoid contempt and confusion and try to promote understanding—working toward some resolution.

Water is probably one of the most emotionally charged issues we deal with in New Mexico and throughout the West. When considering any water-related issue, we are dealing with people's emotions. Emotions must be controlled to some extent during these meetings because much headway can be lost by just one uncontrollable, emotional outburst. You must keep your cool and stay focused on your long-term goals.