

## WATER CHALLENGES ON THE LOWER RIO GRANDE

New Mexico-  
Texas Water  
Commission  
Update

*Ed Archuleta was hired by the El Paso Water Utilities Public Service Board as General Manager in January 1989. He is responsible for all aspects of water and wastewater service to the Greater El Paso Metropolitan Area, a population of more than 650,000. From 1974-1989, Ed worked for the City of Albuquerque in various positions with the City's Water and Wastewater Department, including that of Assistant Director/Operations, Public Works Department. Active in several technical and professional organizations, Ed serves as a member of a number of boards including the American Water Works Association Research Foundation. Ed earned bachelor's and master's degrees in civil engineering from New Mexico State University and a Master of Management degree from the University of New Mexico.*



## New Mexico/Texas Water Commission: Update on Commission Activities

The New Mexico/Texas Water Commission is a product of the litigation between El Paso and New Mexico, which was resolved in 1991. When I first came to El Paso in 1989, I talked to my Board about developing a long-term (50-year) plan for water. We now are implementing that plan as many of you know. The plan has served as an impetus for developing ideas and strategies that can be used to do things differently—as opposed to prolonged litigation, which is what had been happening for years. Thus we settled a lawsuit and we established what was to become known as the New Mexico/Texas Water Commission.

The Commission comprises seven members: two irrigation districts, two cities, two universities and one county, Doña Ana County. The Commission has been planning and guiding the work that will be described to you on videotape this morning. I want to thank all the members of the Commission—and

most of them or their representatives are here today—on the work that we have done and will continue to do.

Water planning is very complex. Three states and two nations are involved in our planning. We probably do not remind people enough of the fact that we live in the Chihuahuan Desert. Sometimes we act as if we do not live in a desert at all and we try to emulate a different environment. This year-to-date, we have received less than five inches of precipitation and we are trying to work our way up to seven or eight. We are concerned about a drought just like you. We are due for drought conditions on the river, and most of us in our adult life have never had to deal with that type of a drought, particularly from a water management standpoint.

After the Commission got organized and we started with our planning, we had to find funding. You heard earlier today that New Mexico is facing a shortfall in terms of obtaining funds to meet its needs—Texas has the same problem. Currently, Texas is conducting statewide water planning. There are more requests for money than there are monies available, so it is not an unusual problem. The first thing the Commission did was decide that we would pursue funding from our respective states. We put in some money ourselves, but we also were going to seek assistance in Washington, D.C. We made several trips to Washington. The Bureau of Reclamation, thanks to Commissioner Eluid Martinez and his staff, provide substantial monies for the project. The Environmental Protection Agency, after a lot of

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work in Washington and Dallas, gave us a substantial grant this year. The Texas Water Development Board, New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission, and other entities are contributing financially to the planning.

We now have a model on the Rio Grande that we did not have before. We have an enhanced groundwater model that Dr. Tom Maddock had developed for the Elephant Butte Irrigation District that is now available and usable. We have developed the tools we need in order to conduct our planning. Before you can do planning, you must have the tools.

If you saw yesterday's *USA Today*, you may have noticed the nearly five-page spread on water issues throughout the country. The article indicated—

and it focused more on water quality than water quantity—that the biggest problem in this country related to water is not necessarily about larger systems, but with smaller systems: rural systems, small community and

non-community systems. In 1995 we went to our state legislature and we became the regional water planner for El Paso County. That has helped us enormously in working with our small regional providers or local entities. I know New Mexico is doing the same thing here in Doña Ana County through the work of the Lower Rio Grande Water Users' Organization as Mayor Rubén Smith described earlier today. It is very important not only to come together from respective states, but the bigger picture requires us to come together as a region. I drive to Las Cruces frequently and notice how this region just keeps getting closer together in terms of development.

The Commission hired professionals to help us with the planning. Bill Webster with Boyle Engineering is the lead engineer; Ken Needham with Parsons Engineering Science, which is a subcontractor to Boyle; and Tom Haislip with CH2M HILL are doing the environmental assessment work. We also decided we needed to hire a communications firm because we can talk to ourselves but many times we do not talk to the public, the customers, and the elected officials who make the decisions. We hired Katz and Associates to help us with our communica-

tions strategy, and Hector Gonzales is here today from Katz and Associates. They produced the video that we are going to show. We think this 13-minute video is very well done. Thank you.