

Jim Williams was employed by the New Mexico State Engineer from 1948-1978. He was assigned to the Roswell District of the Office of the State Engineer in August 1956 and later transferred to Albuquerque to establish the District 1 office which was scheduled to open on November 29, 1956, the same time the Rio Grande Underground Basin was to be declared by the State Engineer. Jim assisted in developing the administrative criteria for the Rio Grande Underground Water Basin. As District Supervisor in Albuquerque from 1956-1978, he was responsible for groundwater administration and to some extent, surface water administration, between Elephant Butte and the New Mexico-Colorado state line and between the Pecos Divide and the New Mexico-Arizona state line. Upon retiring from OSE, he became President and General Manager of a water and wastewater distribution system. Jim retired at the end of 1991 and served as a consultant until the fall of 1992.



Rio Grande Underground Water Basin Declared

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From September 1956 to November 29, 1956, I worked with other staff members to develop administrative criteria for the declaration of the Rio Grande Underground Water Basin to be declared on November 29, 1956. On November 29, 1956, I was appointed supervisor of the newly declared basin, along with the supervision of the Estancia and Grants Bluewater Basins.

Steve Reynolds, the state engineer, had no alternative but to declare the basin for at least some of the following reasons:

1. New Mexico was not making its commitments under the Rio Grande Compact.
2. The Rio Grande was over appropriated and the relationship between the river and the groundwater reservoir indicated that groundwater development was contributing to the over-appropriation of the river.

3. Federal law suits filed by Texas against the state of New Mexico and the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District as early as 1951, could at some point in time place a federal water master on the Rio Grande.
4. All but one municipality along the middle and upper Rio Grande was supplied by groundwater. Population projections indicated that more groundwater would be needed in order to meet future demands.
5. There was information that large groundwater diversions for farming operations were planned. Steve knew that the declaration of the basin would be very controversial so he obtained the support of Governor Sims and incoming Governor Mecham before he declared the basin.

The administrative policy developed for the basin was different from those of other declared basins. The idea was to protect the river, but still permit mining of the groundwater reservoir as long as the effects on the river were offset by the retirement of valid existing water rights. In theory this was a good idea and it lessened some of the criticism directed toward the state engineer.

Based on information that I have received, some of the municipalities and others are now at the point where they need additional water rights in order to continue pumping. If these parties are unable to offset their effects on the river then lengthy litigation may follow during which time the river may

The Rio Grande

Compact:

It's the Law! be impaired and this could have an adverse impact on our compact commitments.

The following are examples of news reports during the period.

Rio Grande
Underground
Water Basin
Declared

Portales Daily Tribune, Nov. 30, 1956
RIO GRANDE VALLEY DECLARED
WATER BASIN

Albuquerque Journal, Nov. 30, 1956
DAM-COLORADO DISTRICT OF RIO SO
DESIGNATED

Albuquerque Journal, Dec. 17, 1956
UNDERGROUND WATER PLAN ORDERED
BY STATE ENGINEER DRAWS FIRE FROM
SANCHEZ

City of Albuquerque City Commission Chairman Maurice Sanchez suggests that the City ignore the action of the State Engineer. The order is the most ill-advised and ill-conceived action possible. The chairman urged that the governor immediately direct the State Engineer to rescind the order.

Albuquerque Journal, Dec. 17, 1956
TAOS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS NIX
UNDERGROUND WATER ORDER

Letters sent to Governor Mechem and to New Mexico Senators and Representatives:

Albuquerque Journal, Dec. 19, 1956
SANCHEZ URGES CITY TO REFUSE RIO
RULES

Albuquerque Journal, Dec. 19, 1956
WATER EDICT TO END FARMING IN
VALLEY BUREAU HEAD SAYS

Stated by Ernest Alary, President of the Bernalillo and Sandoval County Farm and Livestock Bureau

Albuquerque Journal, Dec. 23, 1956
WATER BASIN A NECESSITY, MECHEM
THINKS

Albuquerque Tribune, Dec. 24, 1956
SANCHEZ SAYS EDICT TO HINDER
INDUSTRY HERE

Albuquerque Journal, Jan. 4, 1957
MORE HEARINGS DUE ON WATER BASIN
ORDER

Martin Threet, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy

District attorney, questioned legal authority of Reynolds.

Albuquerque Journal, Jan. 4, 1957
UNDERGROUND WATER DISTRICT
DRAWS FIRE

Martin Threet declares Reynolds exceeds statutory authority.

Taos News, Jan. 4, 1957
FARM BUREAU PLANS COURT ATTACK
ON WATER BASIN ORDER

Albuquerque Tribune, Jan. 7, 1957
LAW TO KNOCK OUT RIO WATER BASIN
IS SOUGHT

With heavy support, Legislature proposes to wipe out Rio Water Basin.

Albuquerque Tribune, Feb. 8, 1957
HEARING SCHEDULED ON BILL TO
UPSET WATER BASIN ORDER

Albuquerque Journal, May 16, 1957
CITY TO FILE SUIT IN WATER RULING

Albuquerque Journal, May 22, 1957
COURT DECISION ON WATER BASIN TO
BE APPEALED

Albuquerque Journal, May 24, 1957
DEFENDANTS FILE NEW COURT ACTION
IN WATER CASE

Albuquerque Journal, May 30, 1957
JUDGE TURNS DOWN CITY'S PLEA IN
CASE ON RIO GRANDE BASIN

Albuquerque Tribune, Nov. 5, 1957
COURT FIGHT PROMISED ON WELL
ORDER

Albuquerque Journal, Nov. 5, 1957
SANCHEZ ACCUSED REYNOLDS OF
SELLING CITY DOWN RIVER

Albuquerque Journal, May 7, 1958
STATE ENGINEER WINS LEGAL TEST ON
WELL PERMITS

Albuquerque Tribune, Aug. 6, 1958
CITY LOSES WATER BASIN COURT
FIGHT