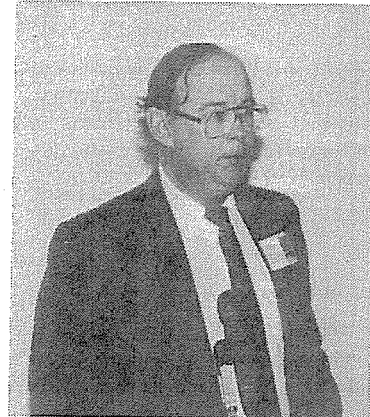


*Lee Tillman has been actively involved in water issues for many years in his capacity as Executive Director for the Eastern Plains Council of Governments from 1975 to present. He has been a strong advocate for cooperative planning to address water issues on a regional basis and assisted local leaders in the development of The Northeastern New Mexico Regional Water Plan, the first plan of its kind in the state. He has been actively involved in promoting the planning, financing and construction of the Ute Water Pipeline project as a solution to long-term groundwater supply problems for municipal and industrial users. Lee, a native of the Eastern Plains area, is a 1971 graduate of Eastern New Mexico University.*



## REGIONAL WATER PLANNING: THE EASTERN PLAINS APPROACH

*Leland D. Tillman  
Executive Director  
Eastern Plains Council of Governments  
104 W. Second Street  
Clovis, NM 88101-7404*

The word "context" has been mentioned a few times today and certainly regional water planning must be done in context. Other keywords used today have been "bottom-up process," "homework," "partnership," and "dust on the shelf." I believe the water planning process in eastern New Mexico was a bottom-up process, we did our homework, and we established some partnerships. Here is a copy of our plan and there is no dust on it—it is not on a shelf somewhere, and in fact, it has many notes in the margins.

It is my observation that 40 years is too short a period to look at New Mexico's water future. If we look at the historical life of communities in eastern New Mexico, 40 years is a blip in time in the life of a pueblo or municipality. We must look 100 years and more into the future to determine if we will have any water with which to work because if we don't have the water, we won't need to plan to deal with it.

Our planning region was established as one of the first in New Mexico after legislation authorizing regional water planning passed. I took the opportunity to testify before the legislature in support of regional water planning because I believed in the need to bring common water interests together.

The "hydrocommons" concept must be adopted in New Mexico. The eastern New Mexico planning region includes 20,000 square miles, 7.5 counties, 22 incorporated municipalities, about 11 acequia jurisdictions, 10 soil and water conservation districts, a conservancy district (Arch Hurley Conservancy District based in Tucumcari), and Ft. Sumner Irrigation District based in DeBaca County. We tried to include the needs of people from all those areas when we embarked on the planning process.

One homework assignment was the study of the very complex hydrogeology of three separate basins. In our area, there is a lack of data for water resources, particularly groundwater resources.

Ultimately, we tried to develop a plan that could be utilized on an ongoing basis by local jurisdictions. We began by indicating that this process would not replace local water planning. We did not want anyone to think that because they had been included in regional water planning in some peripheral way, their local water interests would be addressed adequately. You need to be involved in the regional planning activities where appropriate, but don't be lulled into complacency by thinking someone else is taking care of your

local public interests. Make sure your interests are represented, whether they are agricultural, environmental, or any other interest.

Our plan's goal was to utilize all available surface and groundwater effectively through beneficial use to meet current and future demands. What is at stake is whether our children and our grandchildren will have a water resource and land base in New Mexico on which to build their lives.

Our planning committee wanted to produce an action-oriented document. Fifteen pages of the document describes the plan which outlines these five strategies for local and regional action. Action strategies describe what individuals, private companies, local governments, and interest groups can do to promote common interests. The regional water plan took a stand on some public interest issues. Part of the problem of defining public welfare in our water hydrocommons is that we encompass such a large area of diverse interests. However, northeastern New Mexico is unlike other areas in the state in that our land is 85 percent privately owned. Twelve percent of the land is state owned and only three percent is federally owned. Thus at the very beginning of our plan we indicated that it is the region's policy to protect landowners' rights. When dealing with the regions' county commissioners, ranchers and farmers, you'll find this concept to be very precious and it will be defended and protected. We also assumed the fundamental policy that regional water plans should be considered in the administration of the state's water policy.

For your reference, I will provide you with our water planning strategies. I encourage you to share your individual regional water planning dialogue with others. We must improve communication to make water planning a vibrant and effective process.

Our first strategy dealt with the continuation of a cooperative planning approach. Do not think that the plan is done when it is printed, it is only the beginning, not the end, of the process. It's a snapshot of your starting place, not where you will end up. The planning process must be ongoing if it is to maintain the region's interests effectively. The plan must promote the preparation of local water security plans, a more detailed local water quantity and quality assessment which is particularly important for communities vulnerable to external or internal forces, which could lead to water quality problems or depletion problems.

We also wanted to evaluate special districts. When we started this process in 1987, there was a feeling that we might need groundwater control districts similar to those in west Texas. Because we felt institutions

are already in place, we did not propose any new institutions. Soil and water conservation districts exist and have been dominated by concerns about soil conservation issues. However, these conservation districts have authority for water conservation and water resource management purposes. They do require local financial support to get their job done. Other special districts such as water and sanitation districts could be utilized along with local governments, which have broad authority yet often are under-utilized in many communities.

A long-term water supply strategy is needed in eastern New Mexico. It must involve replacing the finite resources in a groundwater aquifer that will be depleted eventually. We speculate that the Clovis/Portales/Tucumcari area will need to augment their existing groundwater supply sometime around the year 2030, and that projection does not take into account major water quality problems or major raids from across the border. The Ute Water Development Project will address the groundwater depletion issue by providing a long-term water supply for municipal and industrial purposes.

When you start discussing the solutions to water problems, you inevitably end up talking about money. One thing New Mexico has not done is to set aside funds for assisting in instate water transfers and for solving water quality problems. We must be serious about saving money to pay for the expensive work that will have to be done to address our long-term water problems. Our plan proposes a water trust fund. A legislator from our area had proposed the establishment of a water trust fund as a means of funding needed projects.

Our planning group evaluated structural issues also. Everybody has a dam, pipeline, treatment facility or something that needs to be addressed. Engineering aspects were left to the local governments. Our concern was the need to improve and protect each area's water systems.

Our plan has a water conservation strategy. We encourage every community and household to develop its own conservation plan. I am pleased with the leadership the State Engineer Office is providing in trying to bring more focus to water conservation. Our group talked about agricultural conservation and management because of the big dividends possible from conservation. Contrary to what some people might think, from my vantage point in eastern New Mexico, the irrigated agricultural community is doing a good job in using water efficiently. Farmers are investing in improved systems and technologies and we encourage them to

## Regional Water Planning: The Eastern Plains Approach

continue. However, we recognize that there is no incentive to conserve water in New Mexico because New Mexico's water statutes do not provide any incentive, for example, to line a ditch. The saying "water saved is water earned," is not reflected in state statutes. We think a serious effort must be made to provide incentives particularly for voluntary conservation. Our water plan addresses recycling and reuse, domestic conservation and management, and rangeland conservation and management.

Water quality was addressed in terms of localized programs like wellhead protection programs and other simple and straightforward programs that are possible but aren't established in New Mexico.

Finally, our group emphasized implementation because you don't have much of a plan if you don't have action behind it. In eastern New Mexico, many of our local communities have taken action to update systems, to prepare water security plans, to buy water rights and to make necessary public investments. We need to make public investments through broadened public participation. Public support is vital—if we don't have public involvement in the process, we can't implement the plan. The media needs to do a better job writing about water issues that affect the future of New Mexico. We must appeal to the media to get the message out to communities on the importance of water issues to every one of us.

I want to thank all of you for being here today. Your participation is an indication of the interest New Mexicans have in preserving their water future. It is through the union of very diverse interests that a dynamic planning process will yield positive results for future generations throughout New Mexico.