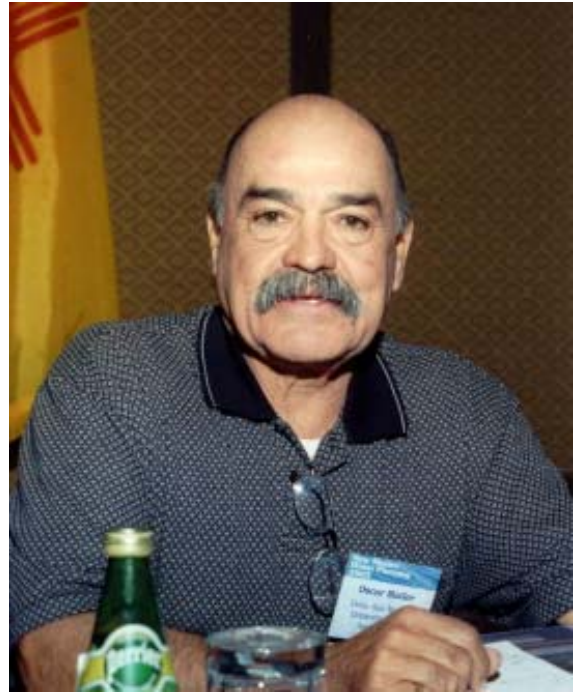


*Oscar Vásquez Butler is President of the Doña Ana Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Association. The Association is the largest in the State of New Mexico, consisting of over 3,000 residential and commercial meters serving approximately 33 square miles, and is currently planning and designing a Regional Water and Waste Water project encompassing approximately 75 square miles. Oscar is also a Doña Ana County Commissioner and a board member of the New Mexico Association of Counties. He is a board member of several groups including the Lower Rio Grande Water Users Organization, Regional Water Planning Board for Doña Ana County, New Mexico Rural Water Association, New Mexico Dialogue Board, and a member of the Alliance of Water and Waste Water Providers, Doña Ana County. Oscar is a retired Human Resources Manager and received his master's degree from the University of Southern California.*



## **PANEL DISCUSSION: PLANNING FOR GROWTH NORTH VALLEY OF DOÑA ANA COUNTY, NEW MEXICO**

Oscar Vásquez Butler  
Doña Ana Mutual Domestic Water Consumer Association  
5535 Ledesma Dr.  
Doña Ana, NM 88032

My name is Oscar Vásquez Butler and I am President of the Doña Ana Mutual Domestic Water Association. I am very honored to be here today. In 1974, Doña Ana Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Association was legislatively established in accordance with the Sanitary Projects Act of the State of New Mexico. At the time, there were only 74 members (74 water meters) comprising approximately 228 household members receiving service in the Village of Doña Ana. The challenge then, and the challenge now, is dealing with uncontrolled population growth and demand for water and wastewater services. Presently in 2003, we have over 3,000 meters and a household population

of over 10,000 and Doña Ana Mutual Domestic is the largest and fastest growing mutual domestic in the state of New Mexico. Therefore, the challenge and opportunity now is to address both the water/wastewater problems and demands of our community. As a mutual domestic, we are not in the position to control growth, nor the demand for services, and by law obligated to provide water. According to the Sanitary Projects Act, it is our charter to provide water/wastewater to our communities as requested and within a reasonable period of time.

Consequently, you are looking at a Regional Water and Wastewater Plan that will provide regional services

to eight colonias (rural communities), the Leasburg and Picacho Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Associations, and two private water utilities. The area Doña Ana Mutual currently serves is approximately 42 square miles and the regional plan would be approximately 70 square miles. The objective of the regional plan is to remove from use approximately 1,200 domestic wells, and as you know, those straws in the ground (domestic wells) are depleting the aquifer, including the removal of over 6,000 septic tanks and cesspools; there is an undetermined number that are setting in the water table or submerged in the water table. We call this current septic and cesspool situation a form of domestic terrorism that must be corrected. That is, there is a great potential for groundwater contamination, which is emergent and that has already, we believe, started to permeate our aquifer. The regional plan will address and comply with the Environmental Protection Agency, New Mexico Environment Department, and the State of New Mexico Water Plan. This effort will implement a regional water plan and will address the future growth and economic development of our communities. We know the challenges are great when you are working with various state and federal agencies, such as the New Mexico Environment Department, New Mexico Finance Authority, Department of Finance Administration, Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Department of Agriculture - Rural Utilities Service to develop and implement a regional plan.

Additionally, we are also working with the Elephant Butte Irrigation District, our irrigation district, to develop a conjunctive water management plan, along with the City of Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, and other mutual domestics in our community to address the groundwater and surface water demands to meet the Rio Grande Compact requirements. It's an opportunity where we can finally build partnerships with other public entities and the irrigation district to meet the water demands of southern New Mexico.

I don't know what else to say other than it has been a difficult road, especially for the Doña Ana Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Association. As mentioned before, we are the largest in the state of New Mexico and considered a public entity under the Sanitary Projects Act of 1942. We are probably one of the most aggressive mutual domestic associations, and sometimes I like to call it pro-active; and as you may know, you can get condemned for being too aggressive, or too assertive or pro-active, but in our

case we had to take the lead because it is our community that is endangered by aquifer depletion and septic/cesspool contamination. Accordingly, we took the initiative and responsibility for the safety, health, and welfare of our customers and region. We have served a larger population than some counties and municipalities and hopefully this year, or next year, we are going to design and construct the surface water treatment plant and our wastewater treatment plant; phase one will be the wastewater treatment plant and, phase two, the surface water treatment plant. We are planning on each unit having a two-million-gallon capacity and a wastewater treatment that creates, after treatment, tertiary water use. We are working with the Elephant Butte Irrigation District in moving through legislation for tertiary water re-use for irrigation (non-food products), and possibly recharging the aquifer to mitigate any loss of groundwater.

We are on the forefront on working closely with Elephant Butte Irrigation District and our legislators. With their continued support, we will hopefully become the model for our area, if not the state of New Mexico.

Thank you.