

**“MANAGING NEW MEXICO’S LAND AND WATER RESOURCES
FOR THE BEST USE: NOW AND THROUGH 2020”**

Consensus report of the Nineteenth New Mexico First Town Hall

Albuquerque, New Mexico June 26-29, 1997

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Importance of Planning For New Mexico’s Water And Land Use Demands

Water and land are finite resources. Water and land are inextricably linked with each other...future planning and development should be integrated, although not necessarily governed at the same levels. Many links between water and land were cited by the Town Hall. Those connections include:

- the location and availability of water
- Native American and other legal claims to land and water
- zoning and subdivision laws and regulations
- environmental protection issues
- water conservation and quality
- recreational uses of land and water
- population growth/density
- traditional/cultural links between water and land

The Town Hall participants gave careful thought to the diversity of demands for water and land. The Town Hall is not willing to confer priority status to any one use. The Town Hall participants urge that historic and cultural uses such as farming and ranching, the use of acequias, all Native American uses, timber harvesting, mining, oil and gas production, military purposes, fish and wildlife habitat, and wilderness be given consideration in discussions and decisions about water and land use planning.

This Town Hall strongly and unequivocally recommends a comprehensive process of strategic planning, information, and communication at the regional, state, tribal and local level with regard to broad-based water and land use.

The Town Hall overwhelmingly recommends additional funding for the State Engineer for reasons enumerated in this report. The Town Hall strongly recommends that the State Engineer be given sufficient money to implement a comprehensive water inventory, adjudication, and administration system, including geographic information systems and a publicly accessible database.

The strongest of the recommendations is that a comprehensive, statewide regional planning effort must be accelerated and adequately funded and coordinated with land use planning to develop a strategic plan for the state of New Mexico. Data collection, public education and involvement, input and collaboration among all key stakeholders are absolutely essential in this effort.

In order to begin to address this program and others, the Town Hall recommends that a dedicated fund be created within the State Engineer Office and enabling legislation be enacted to carry out these objectives.

Technology, Conservation and Policy Recommendations

New Mexico has a wealth of technology located within its borders. The Town Hall offered several recommendations for coordinating efforts and maximizing results.

- Formation of a public/private/tribal partnership to develop a vision for future use of water and land resources and to utilize resources at New Mexico’s national laboratories, research universities, and private industries.
- Legislative action to establish water use, water conservation, and land use standards.
- Development of a statewide, intrabasin water market, and expansion of water “banking” activities that includes pueblo/tribal waters when appropriate or beneficial.
- Establishment of a statewide land classification and inventory project.
- Protection of watersheds to safeguard water quality and quantity.
- Establishment of economic incentives and encouragement to form agricultural associations for efficient water use technologies in small agriculture.
- Modernization of the State Engineer Office, including a computerized data base with public access including Internet access; increased level of funding and staffing for the State Engineer Office.
- Utilization of the expertise of New Mexico Research Universities to provide educational material to the public on a broad spectrum of land and water resource issues including agriculture, range land, water conservation, mining, energy/minerals, solar and geothermal energy systems, legal.
- Coordination of state and federal land agencies with local governments.
- Development of economic policy that derives economic value for conservation.
- Use of tax incentives to encourage the development of water-conservation technology.
- New Mexico Environment Department should evaluate and disseminate information on site septic technologies, alternative technologies, and their appropriate implementation.
- More and better data about water quality and quantity and the status and attributes of land resources.
- State-of-the-art verified and validated modeling and simulation technology.

- Standardize and mandate compatible geographic information systems (GIS), including public access through the Internet, coordinated by the state Information Systems Council for land use and water planning.
- Water separation and recovery techniques for conservation and recycling, beginning with pilot projects.
- Development or acquisition of technology to utilize common brackish water.
- Encouragement of infrastructure to utilize gray water and to utilize lower-quality water for suitable industrial and commercial purposes.
- Discouragement of residential and commercial construction in flood plains where practical.
- Creation of incentives for “infill” development in areas that have already been settled.
- Desalinization, cleansing, or recycling of bad water.
- Implementation of more efficient irrigation technologies, such as drip irrigation, low-energy precision application, and the use of technologies to minimize evaporation.
- Revision of building codes to encourage water-saving and water-harvesting designs, such as water-collecting gutters, storm sewers, and landscaping.
- Eradication of invasive, non-native riparian species and replacement with native vegetation.
- Creation of a study by the state on instream flow as a beneficial use.

Involving The Public

The participants agree that more public awareness of laws and issues is needed in order to maximize the public’s effectiveness in contributing to the planning process. The Town Hall suggests that new models are needed. We also need to use the existing systems we have more effectively, emphasizing

- 1) more and better public and local input;
- 2) cooperation;
- 3) involvement of all stakeholders; and
- 4) early dialogue among government agencies and stakeholders, which results in better decisions.

The Town Hall also recommends the establishment of a public education and communication campaign aimed at the conservation of all uses of water, such as the program that has demonstrated success in Albuquerque.

Who Should Manage New Mexico’s Water And Land Use

The governance and management of water and land is complicated...at least two dozen public entities have some role in the management, administration, regulation of water use, water rights, land use, and planning.

The Town Hall recommends that, as an initial step, the roles of all of the public entities be examined and their activities better coordinated and simplified. Collaborative decision-making among federal, state, regional, local, and tribal jurisdictions, elimination of duplication, increased public and local input, and overall accountability are essential for effective land and water management. These collaborative efforts should be encouraged in ways such as incentives and performance awards.

The Town Hall cited the Lower Rio Grande Water Users Association, the Eastern Plains Council of Governments, the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments and other regional groups as examples of cooperative resource management.

The toolbox for water and land management contains laws, regulations, incentives, penalties, rewards, trade-offs, tax breaks and oversight. The Town Hall suggests that existing tools be utilized more deliberately; moreover, the participants expressed a preference for applying incentives, price breaks, and tax advantages for compliance and superior performance, rather than surcharges, penalties, and fines for noncompliance.

The Town Hall recommends that the state legislature change New Mexico Water law regarding forfeiture of water to create an incentive for water conservation in all uses.

Land and water problems affect New Mexico unevenly. Some areas are already in crisis; other areas may be in crisis soon if the kind of actions recommended by the Town Hall are not taken. A follow-up Town Hall addressing growth management (integrating planning for land use, housing, economic development, water, and transportation) is strongly recommended.

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