

22nd Annual Dialogue Statewide Meeting Planning: How It Can Make A Difference

Summary by Lisa Robert

[Editor's Note: Each year, it gets harder to summarize the annual meeting. There is just too much valuable information to cut. Because Lisa's summary of this year's meeting is 34 pages long, we had to shorten it so it would fit in the newsletter; however, we are posting her full summary on the Dialogue website. Recordings of the full day and access to the Power Point presentations are also posted there: <http://nmwaterdialogue.org/library/asm22-full-report/view>. What follows is an abbreviated indication of what each speaker said along with Lisa's introduction and conclusion.]

In the autumn of 2015, as Dialogue board members grappled with decisions regarding theme, agenda and speakers for the next statewide meeting just a couple of months away, the conference title had already been chosen. "Planning: How Can It Make A Difference?" heralded early notice of the event in the fall newsletter. But sometime between that initial announcement and the actual gathering on January 7, the question mark was dropped. A case was made to eschew doubt, and to confirm instead—on the strength of group experience—that indeed, planning makes a difference. To plan is to have something in mind, and yet, it's wise to stay open to hope and misgiving. Echoes of that valuable gyroscope turn up again and again in the long summary available on the Dialogue website and below as well, because unlike a static plan, planning is dynamic, responsive, and always poised for change.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS



Sen. Peter Wirth, second term State Senator and Co-Chair of the Legislative Water and Natural Resources Committee, also served two terms in the state House of Representatives, which so far has taught him "how difficult it is to do *anything* when it comes to water in the Legislature." However, he reported that in 2013 he was able to pass two controversial bills with support from prior adversaries, signaling "a shift in understanding that we have got to do things differently in this state."

He has recently focused on the membership of two water management agencies – the Water Trust Board and the ISC – both of which have membership almost exclusively appointed by the governor. Wirth carried a bill to change the makeup of both entities. "I felt it was important to have a discussion about trying to balance out those appointments." The bill passed

the Senate but was not heard in the House.

Wirth also noted that New Mexico has a system of water law based on priority, and the problem is that when you try to implement priority, "...you end up with winners and losers, and the winners may not be the ones that make the most economic sense." He sees an opportunity if the actual folks around the table are empowered to make the decisions. That has happened in the San Luis Valley where groundwater pumping has put the region in further jeopardy. Not long ago, farmers there asked the legislature to create small, non-mandatory sub-districts with authority to tax water use – a surprising outcome. He is a huge believer in having regional water planning happen from the bottom up.

PANEL I: KNOWING THE PROBLEM

Aron Balok, of the Pecos Valley Artesian Conservancy District, grew up in Ramah, New Mexico, where "water was a simple concept: we didn't have any." Not so in Roswell, where he first encountered "water in the desert." The learning curve was when it comes to 'knowing the problem,' he says.

In the past eighty years, Balok says, there have been at least ten 'fixes' to water problems in the Pecos, but each ultimately failed in the face of reality. Most recently, plans and policy failed because of inconceivable drought.

Supply is always going to be a variable, so you have to come up with some sort of sliding scale—'first in time, first in

= DIALOGUE =

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Opening Remarks from the President at the 22nd Dialogue Annual Meeting

Summarized by Lisa Robert

Jason John, President of the N.M. Water Dialogue and a member of the Navajo Nation, has worked for the tribe's water resource department since 2001. Even after fifteen years, he says, there's always something new to learn. "I think that goes for everyone when it comes to water, planning and implementation. One of the toughest things we've all had to deal with is the *politics* of water.

The Navajo Nation has spent over ten years talking to the State of Utah concerning water rights for Navajo Nation lands there. We recently came to an agreement for 81,000 acre-feet of depletion per year in Utah, and now that agreement has just started making its way through Navajo Nation Council. In that process, it will become very political." Settlements eventually involve money for projects, and the team at Navajo that deals with water rights tries to "put together a plan that we can stand behind and defend until the very end. That's what the Utah settlement is. We are requesting just over \$200 million in funding for projects that will serve the future for people in the Utah portion of Navajo, to provide water for economic growth... We've been planning this for over ten years, and we're just now beginning the approval process."

John notes that the San Juan settlement in New Mexico was passed by the Navajo Nation Council in 2004, but wasn't approved by Congress until 2009. A five-year time span is "quick in terms of a water settlement," he says, and the Utah agreement is going to "present some challenges. We're squeezed into a timeframe because there's going to be a change in U.S. administration. It's a presidential election year, and there may be new faces in Congress as well. We have to take those political frameworks into account when we're trying to move a settlement through for implementation, so we're on a bit of a tight schedule, trying to squeeze what we did in five years for the San Juan into *one* year for the Utah settlement. That is quite ambitious."



The Navajo Nation is home to "a large political front that desires a lot of information when it comes to water right settlements," John says, and that can mean controversy between those who believe the tribe is owed "these rights based on the fact that we were here a long time," and those who must reconcile technical and legal considerations within the existing policy framework of the Colorado River Basin and the State of Utah. "All of those factors go in and it will become very political as people start to express their opinions about what a water right should be."

The parallels to regional water planning in New Mexico are not lost on John. As a member of a government staff, and as president of the not-for-profit Water Dialogue, he knows the concerns of both citizen advocates and state employees. "I share the same situation as the state folks when I'm talking to the Navajo Nation's public about water planning. People want information; they want us to come out to their area and have a dialogue with them about water now, water in the past, water in the future." That requires resources and manpower, both of which are in short supply. As advocacy organizations and government agencies put heavier emphasis on water planning, insufficient funding is an issue common to all, John says. "Yes we need more money for planning, but we all should agree on where that money in the future is focused."

Aron Balok



right', priority dates, adjudication. "We *have* to get our state adjudicated to fix the problem," Balok says, but Active Water Resource Management scares him because nobody can put a finger on what it is. However, all parties realize they're facing the real threat of a priority call—that they'll have to curtail pumping, with maybe millions or billions of dollars worth of economic impact. Then they'll decide to do *something*."

Norm Gaume



Norm Gaume, retired P.E., Water Resources Consulting Engineer, says knowing the problem is the first step in clear thinking about anything we do. Knowing the problem needs to be done on a collective basis, Gaume says, because "these are societal issues with a public resource that's essential to us all. There needs to be some consensus if we're going to get a good solution."

Gaume was able to successfully apply this model two times during his career, first to reduce groundwater depletions and then to come to an agreement in the Pecos Valley after an intensive five-year public process. Today, New Mexico has a Pecos Compact credit of over 100,000 acre-feet.

Gaume was asked to address what several current and controversial water development proposals have in common: the Gila River Diversion and Storage Project, authorized by the 2004 Arizona Water Settlements Act; the water supply for the Santolina Master Planned Development on Albuquerque's west side; and the "scheme" to export groundwater from the San Augustin Plains in Catron County. "The most striking common factor is that none of the three is the result of considered planning," Gaume says. "We didn't define a problem; we didn't define alternatives; we didn't select a solution... Also common to the three proposals is the fact that they are 'pushed by proponents and speculators seeking private benefit at public expense.'" Underlying all these projects is the need to base decisions on hydrologic reality. "We need to be talking about real water and real water rights," Gaume says.

Virginia Necochea, Executive Director of the Center for Social Sustainable Systems, is an educational researcher in the field of race studies and cultural foundations. Necochea heads SESOS, an organization which strives to protect traditions and ways of life in her community, the Valle de Atrisco in Albuquerque's South Valley.

Virginia Necochea



She knows that the Santolina Master Plan threatens her community. "The enormous cultural and capital value of water rights and irrigable land are irrefutable," says Necochea. "In contradiction, the South Valley is considered one of the poorest areas in Albuquerque while the water for new development will have to come from existing users—farmers and irrigators in the mid-Rio Grande valley. There is no unallocated water in the basin."

"Water planning on any level stands to make the greatest difference if it truly integrates the needs and voices of those who continue to be left in the margins: the poor, the historically disenfranchised, those that will be most impacted by proposed change, and those on the front lines," she concludes.

REPORTS ON NEW STUDIES

Ken Peterson



Ken Peterson, hydrologist and modeler with the New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute, says withdrawals that constitute the "administrative water supply" are very well known and reported every five years, but that is only a piece of the picture. The total physical supply is *not* as well known, and represents a much larger portion of the overall water budget than "the human part." Total administrative withdrawals vary annually according to availability, but they are less variable than actual precipitation or evaporation.

Peterson says estimates of evapotranspiration are "fairly unreliable still," and modelers are trying to devise ways to "capture" that variability and temporality.

Peterson believes the Dynamic State-wide Water Budget is New Mexico’s answer to keeping up with trends in planning because it “synthesizes water supply-and-demand information from across the state into a single tool, to provide information on water sources and use at a variety of spatial scales.”



Phil King

Phil King, Professor of Civil Engineering at NMSU, quips, “Chaos is something you’re not so aware of if you’re in the street, floating along *with* it.” That’s a reference to the hydrologic reality of the Lower Rio Grande, which King and several other resource experts studied at the behest of the State Legislature in 2014 (see “Learning to Live With Less Water,” *NM Water Dialogue*, Spring, 2015).

One “deliverable” of the requested supply and demand assessment was “a coherent list of vulnerabilities” that the LRG faces to help with policy formation at the state level. King believes what the interdisciplinary and inter-university group learned has already aided decision making at the *local* level. One product of the study is a greater understanding of the increased reliance on groundwater. During the *current* drought, bigger and more numerous modern wells have rapidly created a “cliff” effect, with “drains going dry and river conveyance efficiency going down very quickly.”

“Whether or not you buy the notion of climate change, there are bigger and better droughts out there than what we’re seeing...Something is going on that’s very different now.” In addition, there are bigger “legal vulnerabilities,” King acknowledges, referring to the Supreme Court case

Texas filed in 2013. “You could get away with that in the 1990s, but you can’t get away with it in the 2000s.”

PANEL II: REGIONAL WATER PLANNING—EMERGING ISSUES

John Brown, of the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly and the Water Dialogue, believes the first emerging issue is a structural one, that involving “who and what constitutes the water planning regions.” He cited the need for ensuring that all significant stakeholders are adequately represented, and worried that there are no guarantees that any element of a regional water plan will ever be implemented and that there is no provision for continuity of the regional planning effort.



John Brown

To be effective, planning needs to happen “in closer synch with the agencies and actors that open and close the valves” by “paying attention to the design of the institutional arrangements for making that happen,” and taking into account those critical intangibles “that markets ignore as ‘externalities,’ including the loss of ecosystem services and other costs we all bear as a society.” See <http://nmwaterdialogue.org/new-mexico-water-dialogue/library/water-governance> for papers issued by Governance Study Group.

Sharon Hausam, Planning Program Manager with the Pueblo of Laguna and a Dialogue Board member, remembers that “drivers for, and barriers to, participation” was a topic of much interest at last summer’s gathering of regional water planners at Sevilleta. The Governance Study Group, formed as a result of that meeting,



Sharon Hausam

has since drafted a series of issue papers, with recommendations for improving state and regional planning efforts. Among these are concerns that it’s useful to have the participation of people who will be affected by decisions, that stakeholders both understand what is going on, and that the process allows them to inform the outcome. The process needs to make sure that it makes an effort to enable people to participate.

The Governance Study Group recommends establishing a new and permanent form of regional planning entity, as noted earlier by John Brown. A permanent organization at the regional level could take more time to seek out stakeholders, use best practices for informing the public, create more forums for participation, and keep people engaged by formally acknowledging their input.

Dagmar Llewellyn, a hydrologist with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, highlighted a number of federal programs that foster “water management planning” and offer assistance to regional water planning groups “in figuring out what the water



Dagmar Llewellyn

supply is going to be in the future, and how we can address growing gaps between supply and demand.” These programs dovetail, she says, with the purposes of the day’s Dialogue meeting in that they encourage institutions to become more nimble and systems to become more resilient, they offer opportunities for federal assistance in funding, and they look to “enhance the dialogue through cooperation and coordination” via partnerships between Reclamation and local water management entities.

A directive “from high up in Reclamation” has prompted the incorporation of climate change planning into all of the agency’s activities, Llewellyn says, and the agency is starting a brand new program on drought resilience, and offers water conservation field services. It just issued the [SECURE Water Act Report](#) to Congress, which is summarized on page 7 and includes a WaterSmart program to examine “the groundwater component of a water budget for New Mexico, dovetailing with the work WRRI is doing.”

In addition, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is trying to “bring together in one coordinated program” all of the federal entities working on climate change and planning in the Rio Grande basin at large. Efforts include prize competitions for desalinization, evaporation suppression technology for reservoirs, and better forecasting tools and communication.



Laura Paskus

Laura Paskus, a journalist who covers Western land, water, wildlife and energy issues, has just started a new project with

New Mexico In Depth, a non-profit media organization that posts its content to a website, and shares it with various print, online, radio and television partners. Paskus’ goal is to “write something that will resonate with people and make them suddenly really interested in water issues... Every story I write, I think this is it, this is the time, everybody’s going to snap to attention and everything’s going to change!” Alas, not so far. “When editors try to tell me that water is not an interesting story, or not an easy story for people to understand, I think that’s a total load of crap.”

At a talk by Dr. Eric Blinman on past adaptation in the Southwest in the face of big climatic changes and drought, she found herself taking pages of notes. Later, she distilled them down to four points: cultural expectations are abandoned with difficulty; people try to persist until too late; social conflict and breakdown make the economy worse; migration is the ultimate solution to climate change. “Here in New Mexico, we know what’s coming... The thing that I think continues to hold New Mexico back—and maybe holds all of humanity back—is political will... Talk about solutions,” she says, “even if it makes people mad.”

PANEL III: REPORT AND UPDATES FROM THE ISC



Deborah Dixon

Deborah Dixon, Director of the Interstate Stream Commission, says that satisfying demands that we think we have is very complex. Besides the experts, the professionals, scientists, and the govern-

ment, solving problems has to include “those who have something at stake” as well as “processes, good leadership, lots of communication, and undoubtedly, some policy changes.”

When the ISC recognized it needed to update water plans with limited resources, “we improved the process as we thought was appropriate, which was to try and make the plans consistent.” With limited funding and staff, it’s been a challenge, but they are on a schedule to complete the updated regional plans in 2016 and have them accepted by the Interstate Stream Commission by the end of the year.



Angela Bordegaray

Angela Bordegaray, Water Planner for the Interstate Stream Commission, says relative to the theme for Dialogue’s 22nd annual meeting, planning has already made a difference. “It’s hard to measure and quantify the value of planning, but for some reason, we all know it’s important. In the regional arena, planning helps us educate each other about issues and what our neighbors might do to resolve water challenges. That’s perhaps the greatest value right there.”

Tom Morrison, a hydrology consultant with the Office of the State Engineer, says ISC planner Angela Bordegaray asked for a way to estimate the water supply for each of the sixteen regions. “We also needed a forecast for the water supply fifty years into the future,” all of it to be done within a two-year timeframe and on a limited budget.

“We started by looking at the existing plans. Most of them utilized a water budget approach, showing inflows, outflows,



Tom Morrison

recharge and discharge, but did not include *institutional constraints* such as water rights limitations, and *legal* limitations on access to supply.

The ISC needed a plan that relies on available data and ability to use the *2010 Water Use and Categories Report* that the State Engineer published in 2013. They also needed to deal with drought. Morrison acknowledges that “a number of assumptions were made. We *had* to make assumptions. Some of them could be replaced with more rigorous work, and we’re hoping in the future we can do a much better job of estimating the water supply for the state.”

Marquita Russel, Chief of Programs at the New Mexico Finance Authority, says that for the past twenty years, the agency has been “a major funder of public infrastructure projects around the state,” with fifteen different funding programs, including one that supports water, planning, and bringing wastewater services to areas

watershed restoration and management projects, flood prevention, water conservation, water treatment, and water storage. The Water Trust Board funds water conservation plans, master plans, comprehensive plans, portions of asset management plans, metropolitan redevelopment plans and economic development plans.



Marquita Russel

without such systems. Created in 2002, the Water Trust Board is a diverse, sixteen-member body that reviews water projects and makes recommendations to the legislature on how to spend an annual \$20- to \$40 million in state severance tax monies on “everything from the source of water to the use of water,” including Endangered Species Act projects and implementation,

A CONCLUSION FOR THE TIME BEING

Just as the last minute word juggling in Dialogue’s Statewide Meeting title portends, *planning* embodies the opportunity to think again. The message that citizens and scientists and legislators and funders and technical people have all underscored here is that we must resist entombing what we know in concrete. We have to be willing to revisit, revise, and perpetually tweak even the best of our statistics, assumptions and processes. Stasis is the equivalent of surrender. For tomorrow’s sake, we need that ‘ing’ at the end of ‘plan.’

Students Given Scholarships to Attend the Dialogue’s Annual Meeting

This year, a very generous and thoughtful donor provided scholarships to students to attend the Dialogue’s annual statewide meeting in January. The 13 students listed below applied for and received scholarships to attend. While the donor wishes to remain anonymous, we do have a quote that expresses the reasons for this scholarship program.

“It is important for the coming generation to bridge the gap between our past and our future. The responsibility for conservation of our precious water resources will fall to them. The NM Water Dialogue is able to provide a forum in which they can interface with experts in an informal setting, gaining new insights into their responsibility to the next generation and to the State of New Mexico.”

The Dialogue wishes to thank the donor for this important gift. We are excited to provide an opportunity for students to be included in the on-going dialogue about how to best meet the state’s water needs.

List of scholarship recipients:

Lauren Asher
Daniel Guerrero
Cara Lynch
Selena Sauer
Catherine Zemlick

Sara Gerlitz
Kate Lacey
Jeremy Martin
Chase Stearns
Sean-Paul von Ancken

Jonathan Gladding
Elizabeth Lake
Carl Neill

Two Studies Released Related to Climate Change in New Mexico

Interior Department Releases Report Underscoring Impacts of Climate Change on Western Water Resources

Putting the national spotlight on the importance of water sustainability, the Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Reclamation released the [SECURE Water Act Report](#), a basin-by-basin report that characterizes the impacts of climate change and details adaptation strategies to better protect major river basins in the West that are fundamental to the health, economy, security and ecology of 17 Western states.

“One of the greatest challenges we face is dealing with the impacts of climate change on our nation’s water, which is really the lifeblood of our economy,” said Interior’s Deputy Secretary Michael L. Connor. “We need to continue to develop collaborative strategies across each river basin to ensure that our nation’s water and power supplies, agricultural activities, ecosystems, and other resources all have sustainable paths forward.” Water supply, quality and operations; hydropower; groundwater resources; flood control; recreation; and fish, wildlife and other ecological resources in the Western states remain at risk.

Specific projections include a temperature increase of 5-7 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century;

- a precipitation increase over the northwestern and north-central portions of the western United States and a decrease over the southwestern and south-central areas;
- a decrease for almost all of the April 1st snowpack, a standard benchmark measurement used to project river basin runoff; and
- a 7 to 27 percent decrease in April to July stream flow in several river basins, including the Colorado, the Rio Grande, and the San Joaquin.
- in the Rio Grande Basin, reduced snowpack and decreased runoff likely will

result in less natural groundwater recharge. Additional decreases in groundwater levels are projected due to increased reliance on groundwater pumping.

“Reclamation, its customers and stakeholders have adapted to various climate conditions for more than 100 years,” Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Estevan López said. “Now changing climate is creating a greater challenge; but through collaboration and cooperation, we will work to ensure a sustainable and secure water supply now and into the future.”

In addition, the Interior Department launched an online tool enabling the public to visualize the regional impacts and potential adaptation options. The tool allows users to check, by basin, how temperature, precipitation and snowpack are projected to be affected by climate change and how climate change may affect runoff and water supplies. The viewer can also check the projected flow of a river at specific points and times of the year and display adaptation options. SECURE Water Act Report, fact sheets on projected climate change impacts on the eight western river basins, and the visualization tool are available at www.usbr.gov/climate/secure.

Confronting Climate Change in New Mexico: Preparing the state for a hotter, drier future

The Union of Concerned Scientists has issued a new report highlighting how New Mexico will forge a new path to a resilient future. New Mexico is the sixth-fastest-warming state in the nation. Even if global efforts to reduce emissions succeed, the current levels of heat-trapping gases will cause the climate to continue to warm for decades, making it essential for New Mexico and its communities to build their resilience to the effects of climate change.

The future climate will change the availability of vital resources, making past investments obsolete, and testing the resourcefulness of New Mexico’s people. New Mexico can survive and even thrive in this new world, but only if it takes the steps necessary to effectively manage and reduce the impacts of climate change and ensure the future security of the state and its residents. The report is available at ucsusa.org/NewMexico-ClimateChange

Call to Action

Paula Garcia, Director of the NM Acequia Association is sending out the following Call to Action to all NM Union of Concerned Scientists members and advocates about the need for acequia resiliency funding:

Acequias are a model of adaptation to water scarcity in the Southwest and for generations have supported the culture and economy of New Mexico. At a time when climate change is projected to intensify drought, wildfire, and flooding, we should continue our support for acequias through investment in their infrastructure and governance. Acequias are making profound contributions to locally grown food, culture, and community and their survival is vital to the future of New Mexico.

We are asking Governor Susana Martinez and state policymakers to support acequias with a fair and equitable approach to funding that invests in their capacity to make New Mexico communities more resilient to extreme drought and flooding associated with climate change.

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NM Water Dialogue gives award honoring the Pueblo of Sandia and Audubon New Mexico

What you believe in ought to guide what you do, which is why the New Mexico Water Dialogue presented an award this January to the Pueblo of Sandia and Audubon New Mexico, two partners in a unique agreement that gifts environmental water to a thirsty river. “We don’t always recognize when good things happen,” Dialogue President Jason John says, “but this small agreement is actually big in the way of planning and managing water in New Mexico.”

Last November, the Pueblo of Sandia made the first donation 100 acre-feet of stored water to augment environmental flows in the Rio Grande in 2016 as part of a pilot project to enhance stream flow and riparian health for the Rio Grande. The contribution resulted from a roundtable hosted by Audubon New Mexico to discuss a pilot project to enhancing stream flow and riparian health for the state’s largest river. In a unanimous vote, Sandia’s Tribal Council decided to donate water to the cause in hopes others will also make a pledge to the increasingly strapped system.



Sharon Wirth, Freshwater Program Manager for Audubon New Mexico, says, “We have many different partnerships, beginning with this amazing donation from the Pueblo of Sandia.” The Bureau of Reclamation and the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, “have shown real flexible thinking about water storage, delivery, and best environmental use of this water for 2016,” Wirth says.

Pueblo of Sandia Lt. Gov. Stuart Paisano accepted the Dialogue award on behalf of Gov. Isaac Lujan, the Tribal Council, and the community. He acknowledged tribal staff members James McCook and Jessica Tracy, of the Pueblo’s Water Resource Division, Frank Chaves, Director of

the Environment Department, who initially presented the Tribal Council with some options for utilizing a hundred acre-feet of water the tribe received last year under an agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation and the MRGCD. “The Council made the decision to donate the water,” Paisano says, because “water is culturally sensitive to us, and to other Native American communities. It is Life to us, and we can’t place a monetary value on it. The only thing we’ve asked of Audubon

is to put the donation to use within this reach of our river, for the fish, the birds, the animals, and to replenish the aquifer... We have to do our part to preserve and protect future generations. This is one small step in trying to do that, for the betterment of not just our community, but of everyone else in this region.”

In recognizing the project with an award, the N.M. Water Dialogue believes as it always has that communication, relationship, and shared vision are the keys to innovative policy and better stewardship of water. The 2016 award may be the first of its kind for the Dialogue, but good citizens willing, it won’t be the last.