

## 2003 State Water Plan

*Section C.6: Include a drought management plan designed to address drought emergencies, promote strategies for prevention of drought-related emergencies in the future and coordinate drought planning statewide.*

### Policy Statements

- *The State shall promote preparedness to prevent emergencies and minimize the harm to the State's economy, environment, and citizens that can result from periods of drought.*
- *In drought emergencies, the State shall seek to ensure that all residents have adequate drinking water.*

### Implementation Strategies

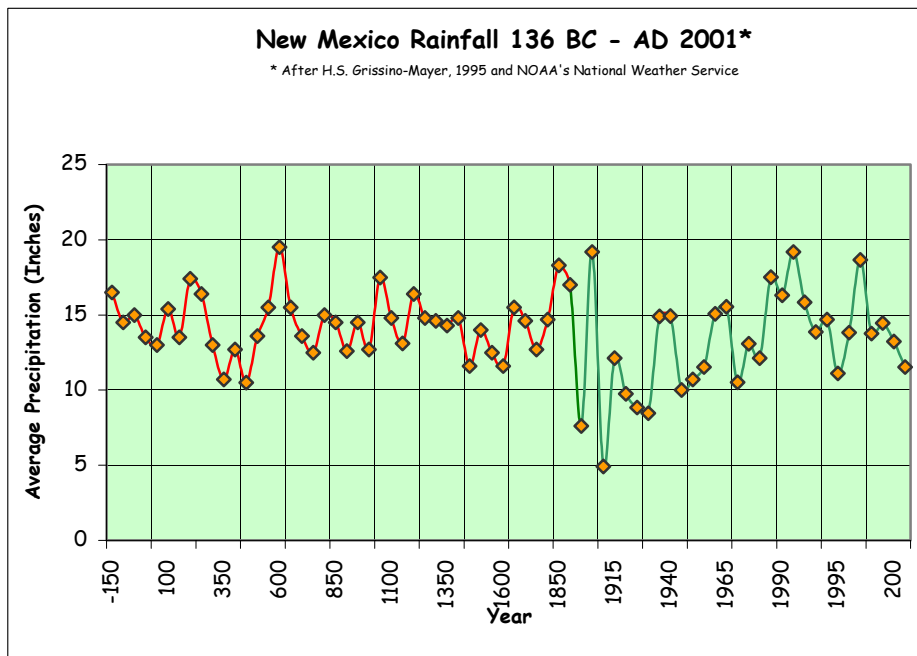
- The State's Drought Task Force will operate continuously and actively plan for drought emergencies.
- The State should fully fund and staff the Drought Task Force.
- The State should fully fund the activities of the Drought Task Force Strike Team and Work Groups including:
  - the Strike Team that responds to drinking water emergencies and assists with drought mitigation measures;
  - the Agricultural Sector Work Group's water conservation studies and workshops;
  - the Drinking Water Work Group's regional collaboration project;
  - the Wildlife and Wildfire Work Group's mapping of species at risk and aquifer recharge locations; and
  - the Water Development Work Group's brackish water mapping and small scale desalination workshops.
- The OSE/ISC will encourage the development of voluntary water sharing agreements as a preferred way of respecting senior rights and preserving the customs of traditional communities during times of drought.
- The OSE/ISC will encourage local governments to develop and implement comprehensive conservation and drought management plans.
- The OSE/ISC will disseminate drought-related educational materials through an active OSE program as well as through water providers.

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- In prioritizing funding requests for infrastructure and conservation projects, State funding agencies should consider the potential for proposed projects to reduce drought impacts on the public welfare.

## Discussion

Cyclic drought is a recurrent climate pattern in semiarid New Mexico, and the increase in New Mexico's population over the past several decades has dramatically increased our vulnerability to drought. As the State and the State's river corridors in particular continue to develop, the effects of drought will be more keenly experienced. In times of drought the State's water resources cannot meet even the current needs of water users throughout the state, much less accommodate new and increasing demands such as federal environmental mandates. Given these challenges, it is critical to both inform and educate New Mexico residents about drought conditions and the threats posed to the environment, to our economy, and to our health.



The New Mexico Drought Task Force was created by Executive Order in 1996. The five-member Task Force was chaired by the Secretary of Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources and consisted of three Cabinet Secretaries, the State Engineer, and a member of the Office of the Governor. Under this leadership the first New Mexico Drought Plan was published in 2002.

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The current New Mexico Drought Task Force (<http://www.seo.state.nm.us/doing-business/DroughtTaskForce/DroughtTask-menu.html>) was created by Executive Order 2003-019 in the spring of 2003. The current 12-member Task Force is chaired by the State Engineer and includes six Cabinet Secretaries, Directors of four State agencies, and the Director of Policy and Planning from the Office of the Governor. The Drought Task Force completed the update to the New Mexico Drought Plan in the fall of 2003.

The New Mexico Drought Task Force has created a Strike Team and six Work Groups (described below) to build upon previous efforts and to address specific sectors impacted by drought. The current groups were convened in the summer of 2003 and have been working to determine their sector's vulnerabilities to drought, to formulate plans and policy proposals to mitigate drought impact, and to take action to reduce the impact of drought. The Work Groups provide a means for representation and participation by a broad spectrum of stakeholders, with representatives from Federal, State, Tribal, and local government agencies as well as private sector organizations.

### ***Strike Team***

The Strike Team was established to respond to calls for emergency assistance when drinking water supplies are affected by drought conditions. Strike Team members are from several State agencies and have expertise in the fields of hydrology and water resources, emergency management, finance, and engineering and construction programs. The team analyzes emergency requests that come to the Drought Hotline at the New Mexico Finance Authority, and if the problem is drought-related, recommends that the Drought Task Force request the Governor release emergency funds to resolve the problem.

### ***Monitoring Work Group***

The Monitoring Work Group includes water resource, agriculture, and climate professionals from all levels of government. The group is responsible for gathering and analyzing all available climatological data, soil moisture readings, reservoir storage levels, and other pertinent information necessary to determine the current status of drought conditions in the State of New Mexico. Based on this analysis, the monitoring work group issues notices regarding various stages of drought that trigger actions by the Drought Task Force. In addition to monitoring current conditions, the group examines and reports on long-term forecasts to assist the Drought Task Force in their preparedness and response actions.

### ***Drinking Water Work Group***

The Drinking Water Work Group is comprised of professionals knowledgeable in fields such as water resources and planning, water construction programs, and water financing. The group works to prevent community water systems from reaching emergency status through improved planning, proper management, and by identifying new opportunities for multi-system collaboration. The group also identifies methods to reduce water use and

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makes policy recommendations to the Drought Task Force for that will encourage water conservation.

### ***Agriculture Work Group***

Drought can produce profound impacts on the state's agricultural industries, and farmers and ranchers have historically been the communities most visibly affected by drought. The Agriculture Work Group includes representatives from livestock and farming associations, land management offices, water resource groups, and fish and game programs. The group focuses on mitigating the drought impacts to the agricultural sector, investigating opportunities and incentives for agricultural water conservation, and helping the agriculture industry to effectively respond to drought. The Agriculture Work Group works closely with the Monitoring Work Group to obtain soil moisture and precipitation forecast data.

### ***Wildlife and Wildfire Work Group***

Drought greatly increases fire danger and negatively affects forest and wildlife health. In addition to the potentially catastrophic effects of large forest fires, drought increases the susceptibility of forests to outbreaks of insects and disease. The devastating 2002 and 2003 infestation of the pinon bark beetle is an outgrowth of drought. In addition, wildlife suffer from lack of forage, and low stream flows increase threats to endangered and threatened species. The forestry, emergency management, game and fish, water use, and land management professionals of the Wildlife and Wildfire Work Group focus their efforts on all of these drought impacts and make recommendations for mitigation. This group closely coordinates activities with the Agriculture Work Group, particularly concerning the Forest Health Initiative.

### ***Recreation, Economic Development, and Tourism Work Group***

The tourism industry represents a significant sector of the overall state economy, particularly with respect to the skiing and recreational opportunities available in the state. A Recreation, Economic Development, and Tourism Work Group will be formed and include representatives from tourism, economic development, and parks agencies and organizations. This group will consider opportunities to reduce the socioeconomic impacts of drought across the state, recommending new initiatives, and assisting with preparedness for and mitigation of drought impacts on recreation, tourism, and the New Mexico economy.

### ***Water Development Work Group***

Developing new sources of water will be important to the continued viability of the state. Particularly in times of drought, alternatives to diminished surface water are critical, as are new sources of ground water to offset or avoid excessive depletions. This new work group will identify ways to develop new sources of water, including treating brackish water reserves and treating wastewater to extend the life of existing water supplies.

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### **Public Opinion**

Public comments regarding drought planning were numerous. A significant number of participants believe that we need to better prepare for drought. A participant summed up others concerns by stating “we need long term, pre-planned drought management, rather than year-to-year planning.” Many suggested that the compacts should be revisited due to changing conditions such as drought and Endangered Species claims.

Education was also mentioned as a way to promote further understanding of the consequences of unplanned drought to the economy and the livelihoods of many residents of the state. Significant comments emphasized the need to educate new residents to the state of the reality that we live in a desert by providing educational material of household and landscaping conservation techniques.

Some participants voiced the necessity for farmers to reduce the amount of water used in times of drought by changing the type of crop grown. This comment was followed by the request that the water saved from this conservation technique not result in a loss of water right lost due to non-use. (Current statutes protect water rights holders from loss of water right due to drought.)

The creation of regional drought contingency plans also received significant comment.