

# New Mexico State Water Plan & 16 Regional Water Plans

New Mexico Office of the State Engineer &  
Interstate Stream Commission



## Recommended Approach for New Mexico State and Regional Water Plan Updates 2013-2015

### AT ISSUE

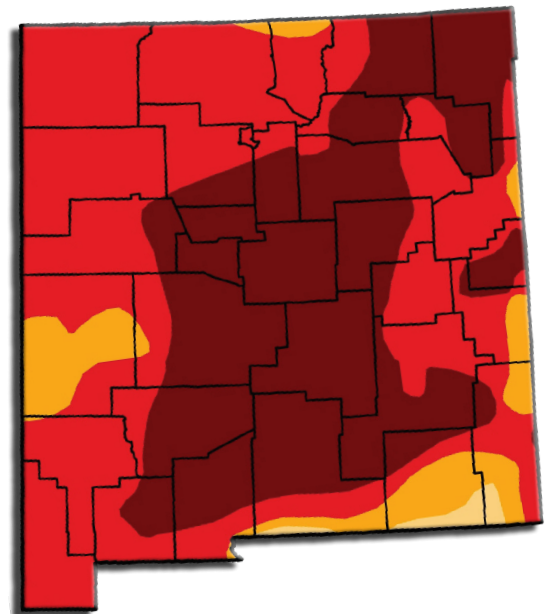
New Mexico is in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year of drought, with most of the state in "Exceptional Drought" status for the first half of 2013. At the same time, July 2013 saw record setting precipitation in parts of the state, reinforcing the importance of planning for precipitation extremes and climate variability. New Mexico has a State Water Plan that is 10 years old. New Mexico also has 16 regional water plans, the oldest now 14 years old. State law requires that the State Water Plan be reviewed every five years and that the regional water plans be integrated, "where appropriate" with the State Water Plan. Other western states, including some neighboring states, are actively planning for dwindling water supplies.

The Water Trust Board is a vehicle for implementing the State Water Plan project and program goals. Criteria for water projects and programs under the Water Project Finance Act include prioritization of proposals that are in an ISC-accepted regional water plan. The water plans matter for publicly funded water infrastructure decisions.

The State must undertake a comprehensive planning process to unite both normal conditions and particular situations when the water availability is significantly different from normal conditions. Effective and efficient management of water as a public resource is simply impossible without adequate planning.

### LOOKING BACK

Regions developed their own water plans over the past 20 years. The State Water Plan was written after the Regional Water Plans, so it is a challenge to integrate the plans, as required in the state water plan statute. Regions developed plans using different assumptions and methodologies for compiling data. Regional plans lack consistent assessment methodology. Therefore, existing regional water plans do not provide the basis for an integrated water plan as anticipated by the decision makers. Like water, resources for planning have been variable and scarcer in recent years. Consistent and sufficient resources have not been available to bring the two programs together to result in meaningful and reliable planning efforts.



NM Drought Map June 2013-100%

## SOLUTION

ISC with OSE has developed a new approach that will focus regional water planning groups on identifying the projects, programs, and funding needs that will help them address the current drought and other long-term planning issues. For efficiency and to ensure that regional water plans “talk to each other,” ISC will calculate water supply and demand and identify legal issues using a common methodology. ISC will also provide population projections and economic forecasts, with input from the regions, to help estimate future water use. OSE will provide a guide to legal and institutional issues affecting water supply and management. These elements comprise a “technical report” developed by the state for each region, leaving the task of identifying water projects, programs, and policy priorities to the regions who know best their needs and conditions. The regions will develop their plans through a stakeholder committee that represents the various water users in the regions. The stakeholders will identify regional

- water planning priorities that will be more closely linked to the Water Trust Board funding process, thus resulting in implementation of water plans.
- ISC has updated and revised the 1994 Regional Water Planning Handbook to provide a common technical platform and process for updating the 16 regional plans by June 2015. This streamlined approach allows updates to be developed cost-effectively using a common methodology to ensure consistency with state water law and policy.
- The updated handbook provides a detailed approach for developing the technical data and updating the accepted plans, and also identifies the respective roles of the ISC, OSE, and the regions in developing the necessary information. The State Water Plan will integrate the information from the updated regional water plans and be completed in December of 2015.

