

The State of New Mexico is developing a statewide water plan. Several years ago, the State provided funding to the State's 16 regions for the development of regional water plans. These regional water plans are to be the basis for county water plans and for the State Plan. Several of the regional plans are already completed. According to a spokesperson from the State's Interstate Stream Commission, all completed regional plans have a least one characteristic in common - none of the regions plan to export water and all of the regions plan to make up their water shortages from importing water from other regions. The Southwest Regional Water Plan is being written by Daniel B. Stephens and Associates Inc. and Phase 1 of the Plan is scheduled to be completed by October 30th of this year. I'm sure our region will take the same posture. Phase 1 includes an inventory of our water supplies, a projection of future water needs and a water budget. Phase 2 is scheduled for completion in 2004, is not yet funded, will look at alternative sources of water and the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing the various alternatives. Public involvement is an important component of both phases.

One of the reasons for writing a State Water Plan is to show that we have a need for our scarce water resources so that we do not have to export more water to our neighbors. The State also realizes the need for a comprehensive plan to deal with drought, the need for a statewide program to provide information on water conservation and the need for a statewide plan to acquire additional water for future needs. The State's goal is complete the State Plan this year. What will the State Plan entail? How will it impact on our water consumption? The Plan is in its infancy so it's too early to tell, but it will probably include some curtailment of our water usage. The Plan will probably allow for water banking. The present policy of "use it or lose it" does not encourage conservation. The Plan will surely encourage conservation and it may penalize non-conservation.

For conservation to work, the public must get involved. Conservation can work. It worked in California and after Californians got used to the idea that the water was unavailable, they adjusted. We can be just as creative. Silver City uses 138 gallons of water per person per day. Santa Fe at 125 gallons per person per day is one of the few municipalities in the State that does better. Is this a hardship on Silver City or Santa Fe? I think not. When you go to Santa Fe and stay in a hotel for more than one night, do you care that your sheets and towels are not washed every day? Do you wash your sheets and towels every day at home? I hope not. Could we do better? Consider Munich, Germany. Munich is a beautiful, modern City. Her residents use 50 gallons per person per day. Conservation can work and can save millions of gallons of precious water. Conserving water increases our water supply, but for conservation to work the conservation measures must be fair and equitable. If the public is involved, the public will understand the importance of conservation. They will also realize that most people and organizations are doing their part. Most people won't give up their green lawns or long showers if they think they are the only ones conserving. But if they understand that the green golf course is being watered with effluent from the wastewater plant, they may be more inclined to do their

part.

As regards our precious water, there's bad news. We, New Mexicans, depend upon surface water for about 50 percent of our needs and ground water for the other 50 percent. In the Southwest Region, and especially in Luna and Hidalgo Counties, we rely almost exclusively on ground water. There is a direct relationship between surface water and ground water. As we deplete our ground water, our streams and rivers dry up. As we dry up our streams and rivers, our aquifers do not replenish. Aquifers are generally considered nonrenewable. Since we are certainly mining the aquifers at a much faster rate than they are being replenished, something has to be done. If we do not run out of water, our children or grandchildren most likely will. Our demands for water are increasing at about two percent per year. The increased usage will make the impact of approaching drought even more significant.

According to the weather experts, severe drought is a reality. The weather service says that our precipitation depends upon El Nino, which dumps us with rain, La Nina that keeps the rain away, and a relatively new phenomenon, Pacific Decadal Oscillation, which is responsible for long-term drought. According to the Weather Service, we can expect to go into a long-term drought beginning in 2004. Tree ring studies tell us the same thing; that the 1980's and the 1990's have been significantly wetter than the average years; and that the drought of the 1950's was close to the long-term average when looked at over a period of 2100 years.

Who will be most affected by the drought? Most of the cities have water reserves. No mayor, city manager or public works director wants to tell his or her constituents that they are out of water. When the drought comes, city residents may be the least affected. The conflict is and will be between those that have water and those that don't. The priority will go to indoor use - cooking and bathing. No one disputes that water runs up hill to money. Who will be the loser in the conflict for water? Initially, urban needs will take precedence over agricultural needs. This is already happening in California, dramatically in San Diego, and Arizona. But in the long run, we both lose, farmer as well as consumer. I don't think we want this to continue and happen in our State. We want a plan. We want to look at reducing evaporation. (We lose as much as 250,000 acre-feet a year from Elephant Butte Reservoir alone. The average loss from the Reservoir to evaporation is 140,000 acre-feet per year.) We want to look at reducing evapotranspiration and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of replacing salt cedar and Russian olive thickets with natural vegetation. We want better water shed management. We want to move forward on desalination and other technological advances. (Seventy-five percent of our 20 billion acre-feet of aquifer is brackish. Seventy percent our national population lives within 50 miles of the ocean.) We want streams, fish, and trees along these waterways. In short, we want our water and we can have it if we get informed and get involved in water planning. The excellent booklet, Taking Charge of our Water Destiny: A Water Management Policy Guide for New Mexico in the 21st Century would be a recommended starting point. The booklet is available at many

governmental offices, the Regional Water Planning Office, and at 1000 Friends of New Mexico, 1001 Marquette, NW, Albuquerque, NM 87102, (505) 848-8232 or visit their web site at 1000friends-nm.org. For more information, come to the Southwest Steering Committee meeting, February 27, 2003, 2:30 p.m. at the Bayard Community Center or call Tom Bates, the Regional Water Planning Manager, at 505-546-8848.

Contact: Tom Bates by E-mail at tbates@cityofdeming.org

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