

PANEL - CITIZENS' WATER CONFERENCES

J. T. McMillen\*

I want you all to know I am a New Mexico chauvinist. I take pleasure in the achievements of this State and of its citizens. I point with pride to athletes such as George Young, world class runner and a classmate of mine in Silver City, and Tommy McDonald, football player from Albuquerque and Jal's Kathy Whitworth, the best lady golfer in the world. I talk about Ed Mitchell who at least was born in New Mexico even if he did leave at an early age, and Harrison Schmitt, another one of my classmates in Silver City, both of whom are astronauts and after next December will both have walked on the moon.

In many, many ways New Mexico and New Mexicans are leaders in this Nation and in the world. We are not perfect by any means and we will never be perfect. But in many areas we are way ahead.

One of the places we are ahead is in the field of water and water law. Way back before this State was even a State, the Territorial Legislature wrote the laws which still largely govern our use and development of water. In 1931, ground water uses were made a part of our law.

At the present time New Mexico is continuing its leadership in water. We are developing a State Water Plan which will provide the guidelines for water use in the future.

This State Water Plan is being developed, as it should be, by professionals. Working under the leadership of the Interstate Stream Commission and the Bureau of Reclamation, numerous agencies and individuals are striving to assure our State it will have water in quantity and in quality in the future.

But this is not all. Our great State through the efforts of Drs. H. R. Stucky and John Clark and their associates at the Water Resources Research Institute have made it possible for the individual citizen of New Mexico to voice his opinions about water and the State Water Plan. The Citizens' Conferences on Water was their method of doing this. Once again, New Mexico is proven a leader.

Delegates to the State meeting were polled as to what they considered the ten most important water problems in New Mexico. Their answers were as follows:

1. Declining groundwater table and diminishing surface water supply;

---

\* Rancher, Silver City, New Mexico

2. Need for improved irrigation systems and water-use management in irrigated agriculture;
3. Water pollution;
4. Need for knowledge of present and future supplies and demands of water;
5. Shortage of water for industrial, recreational and municipal uses;
6. Adjudication of water rights;
7. Improvement of water laws;
8. Salinity of water and its effect on human and plant life;
9. Reuse of water, where practical, by recycling; and
10. Land and water planning and zoning.

We also discussed a number of other topics. Some of these were: A continuous and orderly supply of water through the construction of adequate storage facilities; Flood control; Importation of water; Desalinization; Evaporation control; Improved methods of transporting water: Priorities of water use where supply is limited; Reducing seepage from tanks and reservoirs; Nonbeneficial uses; Need for public awareness of water problems; Need for continuity of programs within agencies and governmental bodies; and Need for more public participation in water resources planning and management.

We particularly discussed the matter of unlimited drilling for water by subdividers and/or those purchasing lots within subdivisions.

Steve Reynolds, State Engineer, and Rowland Fife, Area Engineer, Bureau of Reclamation, and many other state and federal officials discussed with us the State Water Plan and other matters. Likewise, several people from New Mexico State University reported on developments relating to water in their particular specialties.

There are three matters in relation to water use and the State Water Plan that were brought up at the Citizens' Conferences on Water that did not get heavy attention there but which are particularly appropriate to the theme of this Conference (Water in Land Use Planning).

I am speaking of preferential use of water for agriculture, population control and weather modification. These are areas in which New Mexico and New Mexicans are uniquely suited to once again be leaders.

I regret to report that the first of these Annual Water Conferences I attended shocked me, an agriculturist, to the very soles of my boots. The unofficial theme of that meeting seemed to be that agriculture is so nonproductive economically that it was a waste of water to grow crops or raise livestock. The industrialists pointed with pride to how many times they could recycle their water and how many people they gave employment to and the recreationists assured us they didn't use up any water at all and their economic returns were therefore infinite.

Since that Conference, I have been to many other meetings in which it was pointed out that even as agriculture used by far the greatest amount of water, agriculture returned the fewest dollars per acre foot.

I concede these facts. There is no doubt that a larger proportion of this States's water must be and will be used for purposes other than agriculture. Also it is true that we agriculturists are perhaps wasting water.

But is it not also true that there are thousands of acres of land in this State whose best and possibly only use is agriculture and if we do not have the water to use them then where is the waste?

A continuing theme of many of the younger people in our country today is; "Economic return is not the only criteria." I do not claim to agree with everything these people propose but they are right when they say, "You cannot eat dollars."

Clearly the best use of any resource is multiple use whenever reasonably possible. Clearly the choice between human consumption and any other use of water is no choice at all. But ladies and gentlemen, where multiple use of water is not feasible and where the choice is not humans versus agriculture, the choice should normally be in favor of agriculture and it should be so written in our State Water Plan.

The State Water Plan should also carry guidelines to control the growth of population to that which the water available will support. This is true not only on a statewide but also on a local basis. No community or state should allow the introduction into its environs of businesses, subdivisions or whatever would produce demands upon its water supply greater than that supply can meet.

New Mexico because of its present population distribution and because of its small total population is uniquely qualified to lead this effort.

New Mexico is also uniquely qualified to lead efforts in the field of weather modification. Steve Reynolds, our State Engineer, when he was at New Mexico Tech in Socorro was one of the pioneers in rain making.

Senator Clinton Anderson of New Mexico was a leader in the establishment of water research in the United States. The Water Resources Research Institute here at New Mexico State was the first established under his bill. Researchers here at New Mexico State are making great progress in weather modification in northern New Mexico. New Mexico is highly qualified to lead in this field.

More than that, because of New Mexico's low rainfall and high evaporation rates we must lead in this field. Our eventual survival depends on it.