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## Southwestern New Mexico Water and Growth Issues

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People often ask me what I've learned while being on the Interstate Stream Commission. I have learned that you can do anything in an instant that will give you heartache for life. Sometimes when reviewing issues before the Commission, I wonder exactly what is happening. I have learned that you can keep going long after you think you cannot. For those of you who have seen the agenda for the Commission, I do not need to say more. I have learned that you can either control your attitude, or it will control you. The Commission faces many conflicting water issues and I have learned that your life can be changed in a matter of hours for people or conditions that you do not even know about. A few years ago, I didn't even know there was a silvery minnow.

Southwest New Mexico is a very diverse part of the state. Primarily I will be talking about the area of Luna, Grant, Hidalgo, and Catron counties. The area has very high, steep mountains with narrow entries

into the watersheds that continue down to the every flat fluvial planes at the bottom. Temperatures in the winter time are very mild in the southwestern area but it is quite cold in the mountains. Major surface flows in the area include the San Francisco, Gila, and the Mimbres rivers. Average rainfall in the Deming area is about 9 inches a year, which contrasts with the higher elevations that receive 18-plus inches yearly. These facts are important to consider when you look at the water resources in the area.

Figure 1 depicts the area's three rivers and nine underground water basins. The yellow area is the Mimbres. You can see the small area comprising the Animas Basin as well as the Gila-San Francisco Basin to the north. The Office of the State Engineer has declared the closed basins, meaning that you must obtain a permit to drill a well in those basins.

Populations are increasing in all four counties—Hidalgo, Catron, Luna and Grant. Catron and Luna



counties are growing a bit faster than Grant and Hidalgo. Water use for domestic wells remains at about 2-3 percent of total water used. Our part of the state is predominantly irrigated agricultural with the exception of Grant County, which has the mining industry. The mining industry consumes about 76 percent of the total water use of Grant County.

I think that sets the scenario for what is happening concerning economic development in southwestern New Mexico. For example, Deming successfully recruited a truss manufacturing plant. The plant utilizes very little water compared to some of other types of industry that could come into the area. Border Foods operates in Deming and they use a lot of water for 2-4 months each year; after that, they utilize little water especially compared to some other kinds of food processing plants that operate on a year-round basis.

Most of the livestock grown in our part of the state are exported somewhere else. We do not have large feedlots so we do not have large quantities of water going to those operations. Let me share with you quickly the relationship we do have with the ranching and meat industry. We have a plant in Deming that takes meat from the slaughterhouses off the rail, cuts it, wraps it, and sends it to market. This plant uses very little water compared to slaughterhouses.

These are the types of industry I think the economic development folks in the southwest part of the state need to continue recruiting. They are labor intensive activities but use very little water. I think that is the direction southwestern New Mexico must go, not only right now, but in the years to come.

Recently I talked with city officials in Deming after we had our water rate increase in March. I wondered what percentage of that rate increase would be going to activities that increase the efficiency of the well-pumping plants and storage facilities that store water for the city of Deming. Fifty percent of that rate increase will go for those purposes.

You'll recall seeing the closed or "declared basins" from Figure 1. Obviously, water resources in this part of the state are fixed. Towns are doing what they can to improve the pumping efficiency for storage facilities while customers who buy their water have the opportunity to share in improvement costs. Municipalities in the southwestern part of the state are also starting to use tertiary treatment for sewer fluid. Some of you may be familiar with an entity that

may be coming to Deming, a power plant facility called Globe Energy. If they do locate in Deming, they will buy some tertiary treatment water from the City. Some local golf courses are being irrigated with that kind of water. When water is not used for human consumption, I think it is a wise use of our water—it certainly benefit us because it reduces our pumping of the aquifers.

Although you might not think about it a lot, ranchers in our part of the state are certainly contributing to water conservation. I don't know how many of you have ever listened to an old-time rancher, but if you have, you have probably heard him say that a windmill pumping a stream the size of a pencil, or maybe a little bigger than a pencil, all day long will water roughly 100 head of cattle. You may say, "Well, Stan, what does that have to do with this water conference and water conservation?" Folks, it does not take long for that to amount to a lot of water if you continue pumping from a windmill a regular basis. Let me give you a little food for thought. A few years ago the Office of the State Engineer published a brochure called "Aqua Action." One fact that it presented had to do with turning off the water every time you brush your teeth, instead of letting it run. Each person would save roughly 6 gallons per day, or an estimated nine million gallons statewide per day! Do you realize what 9 million gallons of water will do? According to this publication, it is more than enough to supply the city of Carlsbad for one day! Folks, a little conservation of water can go a long way in a very arid state such as ours.

I have a few suggestions I think are not only very pertinent to southwestern New Mexico but to other parts of the state as well. The Interstate Stream Commission is an entity on which I serve and from which I try to assist in the leadership of water resources in this state. Regional water planning is at various stages of progress around the state and depends upon the participation of local folks. Everyone, whether you are a business owner, a municipal official, a state citizen, an irrigation district official, a water district person, and whatever your expertise, needs to take the opportunity to be involved in this program very seriously. We must have grass roots participation and a broad spectrum of people involved in this effort if we are to consider the differing views on water issues that exist. We have already seen here today many differing views.

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Do not leave our future water planning solely in the hands of special interest groups. Some state statutes may benefit you now but being passive to our current water situation may not be in your best interest. The Interstate Stream Commission is in the process of developing data for inclusion into a state framework water plan. We need your assistance in preparing accurate data.

Second, I personally think it is high time that all of us sit down across the table from county planners, real estate people, landscape designers, and contractors to implement some form of rules for the increased application of xeriscaping. Here's a question for you: do you think it is time for those who live in town, and have two yards, to be required to have one of those yards desert landscaped? Now before you react, I want to acknowledge that there is a point of view that says government does not have the right to tell me what to do with both of my yards. And I can understand that, but there is another point of view from the perspective of water resources—conservation efforts should benefit the total welfare of our state. If you figure the amount of water saved from irrigating only one yard for each home in all the towns in New Mexico, you might find that the welfare of the state is greatly benefitted from that kind of conservation. It certainly benefits the aquifers in southwestern New Mexico as well as other aquifers around the state.

Third, I think we must continue to develop realistic and beneficial education programs related to water. Not only in the public schools—and I certainly applaud teachers and others who are involved in that educational effort—but of our citizenry, also. I have been surprised as I visit with people around the state how little knowledge they have about what our interstate compacts provide. I think it is time that we have some type of educational program to post-high school, post-college, grownups if you will, on the economic development efforts and the resources involved in interstate compacts and how they may affect each other. We certainly do not want to repeat the situation we have on the Pecos River—there is no sense in that type of litigation if we can prevent it.

I would also like to encourage you to support expenditures for conducting hydrologic investigations in our state. The Commission spends a fair amount of money on these investigations as does the Office of the State Engineer, and it is very much needed. We must know how much water we have and hydrologic investigations are our best avenue, at least at this point, to determine the extent of our water resource.

As I look to the future of water resource's management in southwestern New Mexico and the rest of this state, I find that the agenda looks pretty full and it's very complicated. There are lots of opportunities for folks and the private sector to conduct water planning and water planning implementation. New technology will assist in resolving some water issues. There are various activities going on around the state that you should be aware of including those in conjunction with the Governor's Blue Ribbon Task Force, the New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute, and the newly formed water task force at New Mexico State University. Legislative efforts will be important and I'm glad to see some legislators in the audience today—thank you for taking the time to be here.

I hope I've provided you with helpful information about the water situation in the southwestern part of the state and a bit about what is happening statewide. I can assure you that the Interstate Stream Commission is ready and willing to do its part in resolving New Mexico's water problems. Thank you very much.