

Our Initial Macro View of the 50-Year Water Plan

Background

New Mexico is faced with, but has not faced up to, important water resource limitations: downstream delivery obligations, federally-mandated requirements, and state-permitted water uses and authorizations that substantially exceed sustainable supplies. Without action to address articulated problems, New Mexico citizens' current and future water supplies as well as our pocketbooks are at risk. We need a documentary vehicle to place the state on a path to take appropriate actions that will secure our water future.

Purpose of this Document

Governor Lujan Grisham's 2018 water policy calls for a 50-year state water plan. The creation and implementation of a meaningful state water plan is urgent. State of New Mexico resources required to support the planning process remain uncertain, and this is impeding progress. This document serves as a call to action for meaningful state water planning and provides one view of what such a plan should address.

Setting

New Mexicans must transform the way we govern, use, and protect our water resources and water supplies. We must address how to manage our future water demands in order to protect and stabilize the state's diminishing surface and ground water resources, which are essential to our continued economic and social well-being,

In a desert environment, possessing and wisely distributing sufficient water to meet needs is necessary for any improvement to our quality of life. The 50-year state water plan must describe how New Mexico can and should deal with its water challenges over the course of five decades, starting now.

Our memories are often short and misleading. New Mexico's twentieth century was relatively wet, and the last two decades were exceptionally wet. Climate models project with high probability decreasing snowpack and earlier runoff, which will significantly impact water management across basins and state boundaries. Moreover, we must not forget that New Mexico is on a path to pump to exhaustion its non-renewable groundwater resources in closed basins.

In summary, New Mexico cannot meet increasing demands on both its surface water and groundwater resources; yet we lack a coherent plan to build our communities' resilience and achieve long-term sustainability.

Purpose and Vision for the Governor's 50-Year Plan

The Governor's mandate states, "We need a 50-year plan and the state must engage local communities on an ongoing basis so we can identify new risks and opportunities as they emerge, and develop new policies as necessary. We also need to build consensus around state and local priorities."

We believe the 50-year Water Plan's purpose is to improve water resiliency for all New Mexicans.

This requires that we:

- Improve our understanding of both the facts and key uncertainties to be addressed.
- Craft appropriately scaled, flexible institutional arrangements for coordinating, managing and governing New Mexico's groundwater and surface water resources to serve the public interest in an era of water supply diminishment, ecological disruption, and economic uncertainty.
- Provide settings where conflicts may be addressed fairly through regionally negotiated agreements that take into consideration effects on all parties that share a common supply (e.g., a watershed, compact compliance domain, or aquifer as the basis for defining a region or subregion).
- Create approaches to protect the rights of senior owners, as OSE describes its mission, while enabling meeting New Mexicans' junior water needs and conserving water supply so that water is available for future generations.

Goals of the Governor's 50-Year Plan Should Include

- Reframe the "regional water planning" processes to:
 - Establish regional planning boundaries that comport with shared sources of groundwater and surface water supply, appropriate to the resolution of disputes based on hydrologic limits.
 - Establish that the goal of regional planning is the development of shared strategies for allocation of scarce supplies that the actors and the institutions with authority will commit to implement.
 - Provide the necessary tools and data required to assure all regional water plans are adequately, scientifically founded.
 - Establish and secure adequate financial budgets for prioritized regional water planning over a defined length of time.
 - Help create regional planning/coordinating bodies, help design their planning work so the planning efforts are productive, and provide the necessary process, financial, and technical support so that the planners can achieve their purposes.
- Establish recommended solutions to compact compliance in basins deemed critical.
- Establish case-by-case desired lifetimes of mined aquifers that support population and economic centers of the state.
- Establish a process to identify and manage unsustainable groundwater pumping.
- Establish state policy for intrastate exports of water to different hydrologic basins.
- Establish a mechanism to rationally vet water supply expansion opportunities and innovation.
- Establish a program of prioritized scientific investigations to develop a robust understanding of New Mexico's groundwater resources.