

**Organizing Workshop
Placitas Area Watershed Planning
November 6, 1999**

***Another 50 Years of Water*
Del Agua Institute**

**Prepared for:
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Placitas, New Mexico**

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Overview

The purpose of the November 6th workshop sponsored by the Del Agua Institute was to organize an alliance or group committed to developing a Placitas Area Watershed Plan. The workshop began with development of a vision statement, and then the group assessed the present reality and drafted a mission statement. After identifying key actions that should be taken in the next year and a half, the group prepared an action plan. Ric Richardson and Kate Hildebrand of Consensus Builder facilitated the workshop.

Vision for the Year 2010

In a vision exercise, the group envisioned the end result they would like to see from their efforts to develop a watershed plan. The image created by the participants assumed that the group will be highly successful and, in fact, becomes known throughout the region and the state as the most effective watershed-planning group in New Mexico. Indeed, the alliance (called the Placitas Area Water Alliance for the purpose of the exercise) receives an award for its work and leadership.

In the vision, Placitas has maintained the "green oasis" around its agricultural and riparian area, despite the increased demand for water that this diverse community experiences. The Placitas of 2010 preserves many of the qualities people cherished about the community in 1999—the beauty of the natural environment, Tunnel Springs, the acequia system, rural sounds and the San Antonio mission. The alliance is inclusive of all community interests and participants, and is successful in spearheading an effort to lower water consumption and conserve a green belt. The community may create a unified water system that taps into a network of water systems. The watershed plan itself is built on robust and dynamic technical information.

With the alliance's leadership role, there is a perception that the reason watershed planning in Placitas is a model for other areas of the state is that *everyone* is involved in conserving and planning for the use of the resource. The process is sustaining and has gathered momentum over time. The participants respect the history of the area and work to build on the history in a positive fashion. As residents, business owners, and other stakeholders work together, they feel a stronger sense of community and perceive that water planning has created new relationships among members of the community and the outlying areas.

Success has come after considerable effort and struggle. Part of the praise for the alliance is the result of its ability to work through the thorny issues and tensions and then move beyond them. In times of challenge within the alliance, people continue to participate. The alliance's strategy is to convince people by example and encouragement—while making them aware of the alternative, “We’ve got to address the water issue, *or else!*” The group educates school children and newcomers, while communicating that people who have made a commitment to live or run businesses in Placitas really have to be part of the process. Their commitment requires them to act in a responsible way and accept limitations the community has set. The alliance also overcomes the reluctance of long-time residents.

Reflection on the Vision

At the end of the vision exercise, the participants identified the following themes that had emerged from the discussion:

- Water is life;
- Abundance and scarcity are two distinctly different views about water;
- The alliance has credibility;
- A sense of community can be strengthened by the process; and
- Inclusion is a key principle.

The group was eloquent when the participants talked about the relationships and the people. Upon reflection, the participants felt that

contentious points are likely to occur, because people believe they have something to lose by participating in the process. There is considerable fear about where the community is going, who will benefit, and what decisions will be made. Some people will ask, "What is good for me?," while others will ask, "What is good for the community?" Some people view water as a commodity that can be developed, while others believe water should be conserved as a community resource. In fact, when we total up all of the water rights allocated by the State Engineer, "the supply is not there."

The watershed-planning group needs to counteract these fears and unrealistic views about the size of the resource by working to achieve a consensus about the information and its implications. Grassroots collaboration is essential to this end. The participants must represent a diverse range of ethnicity, income, land ownership, tenure and values. Achieving this diversity will be a challenge due to the tendency of many to isolate themselves.

The watershed plan will have to fit with the regional and state plans, and that process will require discovery of how the Placitas plan fits with other planning and decision-making processes that influence the allocation of water throughout the region. For example, the Placitas process should be part of the Middle Rio Grande regional water planning effort, but it should not be dominated by that endeavor.

The legacy of the envisioned coalition will be trust and a true alliance between people and the government. A true alliance represents all segments of the community, and reflects history and interests of long-time residents as well as newcomers. As the alliance achieves this purpose, it may shift its focus to additional community development concerns.

Present Reality

During the next part of the workshop, the participants considered their strengths and weaknesses as a group working to form a water alliance. They

also discussed the benefits and threats involved in moving toward their vision for the year 2010.

When they identified their strengths as an organizing group, the participants noted that the assembled group:

- Is willing and motivated to lead the water planning effort to plan for the future of the Placitas watershed;
- Has the technical know-how to accomplish the task;
- Is relatively broad based and representative of the area;
- Has experience in creation and development of public policy;
- Possesses the necessary persistence—and sense of humor—to deal with and overcome obstacles;
- Is knowledgeable about the history of the area;
- Has a high level of awareness about events and forces outside the community that could influence the process; and
- Includes people who are creative as well as realistic.

When they considered their weaknesses, the participants noted that the assembled group:

- Has depended on funding from an organization located in Oregon—and the initial funding has been exhausted;
- Does not yet include and represent key interests—land grant heirs, large land development, Pueblos or Federal agencies;
- Is uncertain about the political support for its work, especially outside the immediate community but within the region;
- Depends on data from outsiders—and the participants had no involvement in gathering and interpreting the data contained in Peggy Johnson's water resources study; and
- Recognizes the potential for divisiveness about the vision of the area's future.

When the group considered the implications suggested by the vision, the participants noted the following benefits of this course of action:

- The planning process could result in a more cohesive community;

- The participants will have a strategy to obtain the vision;
- Each time the group meets, it develops a greater identity and a clearer focus;
- As the participants get to know one another, the individual voices and efforts are likely to become unified in a single set of actions;
- The potential exists to define a sustainable lifestyle, based on living within the community's resources and budgets; and
- The inclusiveness of the effort has an intrinsic value for the community.

The participants also noted the following threats, which are likely to be the source of caution as the group moves forward:

- People may communicate their interests and divergent positions without resolution;
- There could be opposition to the plan late in the process, when it is difficult to respond;
- Despite a good process, thorough work, and strong participation, the study may be ignored by regulatory agencies;
- After an initial spurt of energy and interest, the process may lose momentum and fail to stimulate action;
- Larger forces may supercede and override the alliance's recommendations; and
- The group that provided the leadership for the process may receive no public recognition for its efforts.

The participants reflected that it would be critical to take action in a strategic fashion. The group needs to stay focused as well as weigh the implications and probable consequences of its actions.

Mission

In a brief session, the participants formed four small groups to draft possible mission statements. The four resulting statements were as follows:

"The Placitas area has a valuable history, diverse residents and natural beauty. The mission of the 'Alliance' is to maintain and/or improve these attributes by developing and implementing a realistic water resources plan for residents."

"The mission of the 'Alliance' is to affect the sustainable use of water resources in Placitas. The means to accomplish the mission includes: (a) drawing area constituents together; (b) understanding and living within resources; and (c) developing and implementing a water plan."

"The mission of the 'Alliance' is to develop and implement a plan for a sustainable water future that is accepted and supported by the Placitas community."

"The mission of the 'Alliance' is to develop a realistic plan to educate and promote the conservation of water."

Then the group discussed the common themes expressed by the draft mission statements. The participants identified the following themes:

- Long-term sustainability;
- Sense of community and inclusion of a diversity of people;
- Quality of life;
- Communication, education, and outreach to residents in the process of building community;
- A process to shape change;
- Development and implementation of the plan should represent the best interests of the community—common good;
- Preservation of both community values and water resources; and
- A plan that recognizes all and considers tradition and culture.

Based on the discussion, the group observed that the plan should recognize growth and change while it should simultaneously respect history, culture and diverse viewpoints. In preparing the plan, the group will need to consider what is realistic and what can be implemented and enforced. These questions must be weighed in the context of the plan's fit with the Middle Rio Grande plan, the response from the County Commission, and the needs, desires and response of residents in the community.

At the end of this session, the group drafted the following mission statement, which will guide its efforts:

"The mission of the Alliance is to develop and implement a plan for a sustainable water future that is accepted and supported by the Placitas area communities, residents, and appropriate governing bodies."

Action Plan

The development of an eighteen-month plan of action began by addressing the focus question: **"What actions should we take in the next year and a half to develop a watershed plan for the Placitas area?"** The participants brainstormed and discussed possible answers to the focus question, which they wrote on cards. Then the group reviewed all the ideas and clustered them into priorities for action. The five priority action areas are to: (1) organize ourselves; (2) educate ourselves; (3) complete the ISC water-planning template; (4) build a plan constituency; and (5) present ourselves.

The resulting action plan appears on page 8. It delineates the activities along a time line. The left column (Activity) lists the priorities for action. The second column on the left (Launch) indicates a kick-off event, and the column on the far right gives the Outcome. The columns arrayed between the launch and the outcome are the steps the group intends to take to accomplish the desired outcome.

Next Steps

The group decided to form committees for each stream of activities established in the plan. The participants from the small groups that developed each activity stream will serve as the initial committee. Each committee will meet during the next month to launch the activities. Prior to the next all-group meeting, the participants will think of possible names for the coalition or alliance.

Action Plan

	Launch	1st Quarter (Jan-Mar 00)	2nd Quarter (Apr-Jun 00)	3rd & 4th Qtrs (July-Dec 00)	5th & 6th Qtrs (Jan-Jun 01)	Outcome
Organize Ourselves	- Organize sub-committees - Schedule regular Alliance meetings	- Schedule internal meeting for each sub-committee - Schedule Dec. meeting of Alliance - Establish groundrules - Secure funding - Digest Peggy Johnson report	Organize planning strategies			<i>Adequate funding for process</i>
Educate Ourselves	Distribute information on water conservation techniques		- Gather preliminary figures on demand - Get a handle on watershed boundaries	Refine information on supply and demand		<i>Understanding of supply, demand and conservation</i>
Complete the Template	Train ourselves on scope/import of template	- Develop filing system - Disseminate evolving draft	- Maintain filing system - Know our schedule & MRG schedule - Coordinate w/ data gatherers (ongoing)	Evolve		<i>ISC requirements met</i> <i>Have the information to complete planning</i>
Build Plan Constituency	Identify/complete list of key audiences	Develop public presentation & materials	Have initial meeting/contact key audiences —introduce project, gather input & data	Have follow-up meetings to (a) present progress, (b) present draft with their input, (c) solicit further input, and (d) explain communication avenues	Have series (3) All-Placitas meetings to present draft scenarios of plan and to solicit comments	<i>Community as a whole creates and supports the plan</i>
Present Ourselves	Name project leader	- Designate spokesperson and team presenters - Receive and integrate plan drafts into publicity - Identify & coordinate targets for presentations	- Acquire source databases (needs funding) - Formulate database use approach	- Enumerate, coordinate demos for kids - Develop and send mailers - Design presentations - Implement, host and publicize database		<i>Everyone happy with water plan</i>