

MIDDLE RIO GRANDE WATER ASSEMBLY

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Submission to the Steering Committee

for the

Middle Rio Grande Regional Water Plan Update

June 9, 2015

Part Two

Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles for Updating Our Regional Water Plan

February 13, 2015 Draft

MRG Water Assembly

Courtesy John Brown, adapted from his essay on governing water like a commons

Planning should begin with a set of guiding principles. The following suggestions come from the experience of the past regional water planning efforts here in the MRG.

1. Regional water planning requires an open, public and participatory process to engage as many residents and diverse interests as possible, all of whom are stakeholders. Respect for the rights of senior owners must be maintained in all deliberations and decisions.
2. Trust is gained among parties with divergent interests through repeated face-to-face interactions. The MRG region's steering committee (SC) should aim to be as inclusive as possible. Outreach efforts should be extensive, not perfunctory.
3. The SC should, early in its work, revisit the public welfare statement in the existing RWP, with a view to establishing a collective understanding, even if imperfect, of elements of a desired future for the region. These would constitute benchmark standards against which proposed policy changes, programs and projects should be judged.
4. Honor should be given to the current RWP, developed over seven years with extensive input and money. It contains over 40 recommended strategies in several categories which were evaluated for various feasibilities in accord with the RWP Handbook. They should be treated as a baseline – accepting, adding to, revising, or deleting them as needed.
5. The SC should identify the driving forces for this Update. What was dealt with insufficiently in 1997-2004 and what has changed since 2004 that affects our water future? After identifying such issues, the SC should consider how to draw public attention to them.
6. New strategies are likely to be proposed as a result of work by the SC, the Water Assembly, Public Meetings and others to address climate change impacts, new understandings about variability, etc. A challenge will be to determine how such information and data, which might require new strategies, or emphases, is incorporated in the Update.
7. Implementation will require coordinated action among many parties. What approval and implementation processes should be used to accomplish the goals of the Plan? To assure benefit and follow through, it will be necessary to create a framework for the evolution of rules over time.
8. One way to build trust would be to share data, developing a regional water budget to show where the problems are and the ramifications of addressing those problems.
9. The plan should contain a means for monitoring and measuring the progress of water delivery and management agencies in achieving its goals. The challenge will be to determine how this monitoring and evaluation will be accomplished, enabling future changes in policies or strategies if goals are not being met or require changes.
10. Although it may be tempting to jump straight to identifying and justifying infrastructure projects, participants must remember that such projects are a product, or outcome – rather than a driving force – of the planning process.