

## Seeking Adaptation Strategies to Survive in Our Changed Climate

For some time, we've known that our water demands exceeded our water supply. Sufficient water does not exist to satisfy all of our desires. This gap will only grow with more demands and less surface water. This problem arises in part because we still haven't quite come to terms with the long-term collaborative commitment needed for water planning and implementation. In the Middle Rio Grande we developed a comprehensive plan over 10 years ago in an effort to move us in that direction. Nevertheless, our water resources are under more pressure today than water planners ever imagined. A key pressure is the changing climate. What options do we have as a community to deal with the consequences? Once again, solid data, innovative thinking and thoughtful public input will be critical to identify options that will help our community plan for its future. A great opportunity for the public to actively participate in this planning process is to join us at our March 21 conference.

In 2004, the Interstate Stream Commission -- as well as all 20 local governments in Sandoval, Bernalillo and Valencia Counties -- accepted a publicly developed Regional Water Plan, one of sixteen such across the state. The Middle Rio Grande's Plan was the product of a partnership between the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly and the Mid Region Council of Governments. The Water Assembly is a diverse all-volunteer organization, dedicated to open and inclusive water planning for the region since 1997. Developing the Plan took seven years, hundreds of public meetings held across the region, numerous studies and analyses, and an estimated \$2.4 million dollars in funds from state and local government, private entities and volunteer hours.

The Plan contains recommendations for 43 actions in nine categories. The key driver of these actions was data showing that this region's average consumptive use of water (1972-1997) annually exceeded renewable supply by 15-20%. The deficit was made up for by tapping into fossil groundwater.

In the past decade, many changes have occurred in our water situation. Some urban supply now comes from surface water rather than from aquifer pumping. Irrigation distribution efficiencies have been implemented. Gains have been made in both urban and agricultural water conservation. Population has grown. Attitudes about water have changed. There have been legal decisions, statutory changes, and improved hydrologic and climate knowledge. But we've also experienced substantially less precipitation and snow melt than during the previous planning period.

The ISC has initiated an update process of all sixteen Regional Water Plans. To produce a useful product, the Water Assembly is taking action to ensure broad participation in the planning process. As a step toward a Plan update, we are seeking public input at our March 21 conference to identify options that will help our community deal effectively with weather extremes and future uncertainties.

What we aim to do, in this kickoff, is to collect ideas for objectives, plans, programs, policies and projects which might address the consequences of what we're already experiencing intensified by what is projected. After setting the stage so that we are all on the same page, we plan to discuss watershed impairment, intense precipitation, increased groundwater reliance, and ecosystem degradation. For

each of these consequences, speakers will review what is happening, what is being done, and some ideas to address it. Speakers will focus on addressing where more adaptive capacity is needed, whether current policies facilitate or impede adaptation, what types of system changes we might devise, and what types of lifestyle or social changes might be needed. Expect all to think outside the box in order to stimulate discussion!

Attendees then will identify and discuss strategies to adapt such as lifestyle and social changes, or needed policies, plans, programs and projects which might address the particular consequence. The resulting approaches will be carried forward to inform and augment the ongoing update to our Plan.

Please join us for "Climate Disruption and Our Water Future - Mitigate, Adapt or Suffer - A Call for Strategies" on Saturday, March 21, 9am to 3pm, UNM Dane Smith Hall, Room 125. Please register online through our website, [www.waterassembly.org](http://www.waterassembly.org), for this free public event. The full agenda and the current Plan can be found on our website. We look forward to seeing you! This event is not just for water geeks!

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