

## **Water watch**

This article is one in an occasional series Insight and Opinion is running on water issues affecting New Mexico. Initially, the articles are being written by the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly ([waterassembly.org](http://waterassembly.org)). Other articles in the series are available on The Tribune's Web site at [abqtrib.com](http://abqtrib.com).

Today's byline

Bean is a private well owner in Carnuel and a participant in the Water Assembly.

### **Commentary: Wet expectations**

Agua is precious, and the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly has a plan for Sandoval, Bernalillo and Valencia counties

Kevin Bean

Wednesday, May 2, 2007

There's both good news and bad about water in central New Mexico and other parts of the West.

The bad news is that demand for the West's most precious resource, already in short supply, is only going to increase as the area's population continues to grow. What's more, there will be less of the liquid gold to go around.

A new report from the National Academy of Sciences says the Colorado River Basin, which New Mexico and six other states depend on for their water supply, is more prone to drought than had been thought. The report says more frequent and severe dry spells loom in the future, and it warns area residents to prepare for "costly, controversial and unavoidable trade-offs" in water use.

The good news is that many concerned individuals and organizations are working hard to address the problem.

The Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly is one such organization. Comprised of citizen volunteers from all walks of life, the assembly is a regional water-planning group - one of 16 in the state. The assembly's planning area encompasses Sandoval, Bernalillo and Valencia counties.

In 2004, following an extensive public outreach process and armed with the best information and technical tools available, the assembly produced a water plan for the Middle Rio Grande. The plan found the region has been "overspending" its renewable water budget by 15-20 percent a year by mining groundwater. It also warned an eventual shortfall in downstream delivery requirements - leading to state or federal preemption of local water management decision-making - is all but certain, unless steps are taken to bring supply and demand into balance.

The plan contains numerous recommendations for balancing the regional budget: improving water use efficiency, restoring degraded watersheds, determining who holds water rights and which of those rights are most senior - a process known as adjudication. Perhaps most importantly, the plan recommends a comprehensive and integrated approach to water planning that considers the region as a whole and that directly links water availability and land use.

The assembly is now focusing on ensuring the plan's implementation by local governments. This is a major task, because the reality is that even with aggressive conservation and other measures, the region's renewable water budget can't meet all the demands being placed on it. In other words, balancing the budget is going to require hard choices and tradeoffs in which some demands go unmet.

Implementation of the regional water plan will, therefore, depend on generating the political will to make those hard choices. That, in turn, will depend on generating broad citizen support for action.

The assembly, whose purpose is implementation of the plan through an open, inclusive and participatory process, is committed to making sure the public's interests are represented in this effort.

Current projects, for example, include spelling out the region's water-use priorities in an updated public welfare statement, developing a model of the region using Geographic Information System technology to help the public visualize various water use scenarios, sponsoring public forums on the Rio Grande Compact and conducting classes on area water issues.

By supporting the assembly, you can help ensure that future water-use decisions reflect the region's common interests.

To get involved or for more information, see our Web site at [www.waterassembly.org](http://www.waterassembly.org), or call Assembly President Ed Payne at 797-4306.

### **comments**

Posted by grassfarmer on May 2, 2007 at 8:15 p.m.

I read this article with interest. The use of the term "water mining" is something that the Office of the State Engineer has stated to be at times necessary for the economical benefit of some communities. I guess that is the prerogative of that office, but it leads to the same problems as exist on the Pecos River. Licensed over use (mining) and then the expenditure of millions of dollars of state tax payer money to met the water debt to Texas. There are water debts downstream on the Rio Grande with will be met one way or the other and we the taxpayer will probably pay for it. All in the name of unbridled urban sprawl.

No plan is worth its salt unless enforced. A recent plan for the east side of the state for the Canadian Basin states that any pumping of underground water will require off-set retirement of surface water rights. I'll bet there will be and are many exceptions in the works.