



## **2. Public Participation**

The Socorro-Sierra regional water planning process has used a broad-based, grassroots approach to regional water planning. All meetings were open to the public, and public involvement activities were carefully documented throughout the process to ensure that the full spectrum of public opinion was considered in formulating the final plan.

### **2.1 Public Involvement in the Planning Process**

At the beginning of the planning process, a Public Involvement Plan was developed to outline the approaches to maximize public involvement during the Socorro-Sierra regional water planning process. The plan addressed the following issues:

- Participation and guidance from diverse stakeholders serving on a volunteer Regional Water Planning Steering Committee
- Monthly Steering Committee meetings open to the public
- Special quarterly Steering Committee meetings open to the public
- General public meetings
- Public notice and communication
- Documentation of public involvement

Early in the process a concentrated effort was made to involve local stakeholders in both Socorro and Sierra Counties by including representatives of key stakeholder groups in the Steering Committee that would guide regional water planning efforts. Two committee chairpersons were selected:



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- Rod Hille, Sierra County Planning and Zoning, Truth or Consequences, Steering Committee Co-Chair
- John Carangelo, Mayordomo, La Joya Acequia Association / Socorro SWCD, Steering Committee Co-Chair

The remaining membership of the committee included representatives of the following organizations:

- Sierra SWCD
- Socorro SWCD
- Sierra County Extension Service
- Socorro County Extension Service
- Socorro County Commission
- Socorro County Manager
- Alamo Chapter of the Navajo Tribe
- Caballo
- City of Elephant Butte
- Village of Magdalena
- City of Socorro
- City of Socorro Utilities Department
- City of Truth or Consequences
- City of Truth or Consequences Housing Commission
- Truth or Consequences Commission
- Village of Williamsburg
- Hillsboro Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Association (MDWCA)
- La Joya MDWCA
- Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD), Socorro
- Monticello Community Ditch Association
- Polvadera MDWCA
- San Antonio MDWCA
- New Mexico Tech Physical Plant



- New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources
- Congressman Pearce Office
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS)
- Bosque del Apache
- Elephant Butte State Park
- St. Cloud Mining, Truth or Consequences
- Falls Properties, Inc.

Approximately 12 to 15 members of the Steering Committee regularly attended the monthly and quarterly Steering Committee meetings as well as the public meetings and became the driving force behind the planning process. Others revisited the process from time to time to give input.

All activities related to public participation have been documented, including press releases and other notices, resulting articles or advertisements, meeting notes from quarterly Steering Committee and public meetings, meeting sign-in sheets and agendas, and comment forms turned in at public meetings. Copies of meeting notes and notices are provided in Appendix C.

## **2.2 Strategy to Maximize Public Involvement**

The public in both counties was notified at least a week to two weeks before each of the quarterly Steering Committee and public meetings. Notice was provided through press releases, newspaper articles, public service announcements on the radio, display ads in local newspapers, mailings to everyone on the mailing list, and posted fliers. Most Steering Committee meetings and public meetings were held in the evening or (in the case of the first round of public meetings) on a Saturday to allow everyone in the community to attend. During the second year of the planning process, dinner was scheduled at one of the local restaurants prior to the public meetings to encourage more people to attend.

Each meeting was facilitated to ensure that it was participatory and inclusive. Generally, from 15 to 30 people attended the meetings. Meeting summaries from the prior meeting were made available to refresh memories or inform newcomers of progress in the plan. Comment sheets



were available at all meetings for participants to fill out and return by mail to the project team. In addition, three-ring notebooks that were continually updated with the latest copies of meeting minutes, reports, press releases, press clips, and other project documents were maintained in both the Socorro and Sierra County SWCD offices and made available for public inspection.

In addition to the quarterly Steering Committee meetings, a series of public meetings were held in Socorro and Truth or Consequences to encourage full participation of the public:

- The first round, held at the end of the first planning year, presented the goals and objectives adopted by the Steering Committee as well as research findings by the project team.
- A second round of public meetings (combined with a Steering Committee meeting) kicked off Year Two of the planning process. At these meetings the facilitators and the project team briefly reviewed research findings and then led the group in brainstorming and classifying alternatives for meeting future water demands in the region.
- The third round of public meetings consisted of a presentation and discussion of the proposed alternatives.

Further detail regarding this meetings, as well as the quarterly Steering Committee meetings, is provided in Section 2.2.1.

### **2.2.1 Quarterly Steering Committee Meetings/Public Meetings**

In addition to the public meetings, all quarterly Steering Committee meetings were advertised as open to the public. The following meeting descriptions depict how the regional water plan developed through the public process.

#### **2.2.1.1 February 2, 2000 Quarterly Steering Committee Meeting:**

Sites Southwest drew on the extensive public participation solicited during the two prior water planning processes in the region to extract a draft list of goals and objectives. These were



discussed at length by participants during the facilitated meeting and revised based on comments. They served as principles to guide the water planning effort and are presented below.

- Major goal: Determine the quantity of available water and, if it falls short, alternatives for meeting the future water needs in Socorro and Sierra Counties.
- Objectives:
  - Water Rights
    - Preserve and appropriate sufficient water rights to meet the future water demand in the planning region.
    - Identify the potential water rights of groundwater basins upstream from the planning region that could cause a future water supply shortage in Socorro and Sierra Counties.
  - Water Quality
    - Identify threats to water quality both within and upstream of the planning region, and identify state and local programs that will protect water quality.
    - Identify critical sources of water that require special protection from contamination and depletion.
  - Local Control
    - Encourage retention of water rights within the water planning region.
    - Discourage inter-aquifer transfers of water.
    - Monitor implementation of the regional water plan locally and recommend future additions.
  - Conservation
    - Investigate market incentives to conserve water.



- Agriculture
  - Maintain and preserve prior water rights allocated to agriculture to preserve the agricultural industry and way of life.
  - Identify market incentives that can be used to help retain water rights in irrigated agriculture.

#### *2.2.1.2 February 2, May 16, September 11, 2000 Quarterly Steering Committee Meetings*

The first year of the project was devoted to gathering and analyzing such research data for the project as population counts and forecasts, water supply information, current and projected water use by user, and legal issues. During these quarterly meetings the project team reported on research progress and obtained comments and guidance from Steering Committee members and the public. Steering Committee members and/or the project team reported monthly on progress to the Soil and Water Conservation District meetings.

#### *2.2.1.3 March 3, 2001 Round of Public Meetings in Socorro and Truth or Consequences*

At the advice of Steering Committee members, the first round of public meetings were scheduled on a Saturday to give everyone in the community an opportunity to attend. Approximately 30 persons attended the public meeting in Socorro. As only two people (both of them Steering Committee members) attended the meeting in Truth or Consequences, the project team moved the presentation display boards to a nearby auction that was attended by hundreds of residents and distributed information and answered questions outside the auction entrance for approximately two hours.

At the meetings, the project team described the purpose and process of regional water planning. Sites Southwest presented the goals and objectives and solicited comments. DBS&A and Hydrosphere summarized and presented important research findings regarding the regional water supply and demand. Fact sheets were also distributed for participants to take home and review. Public questions were answered and comments recorded.

Following this meeting was a year's hiatus while a continuation of the project was negotiated with the ISC.



#### *2.2.1.4 April 19, 2002: Public Meeting/Steering Committee Meeting in Socorro*

This meeting kicked off Year Two of the project, which was designed to engage the public in proposing and evaluating alternatives to the way in which water is currently supplied and consumed in the region in order to meet the demand in 2040. Approximately 40 persons attended this meeting in Socorro. DBS&A and Sites Southwest led the meeting and involved the audiences in discussions. Socorro and Sierra Steering Committee members were well represented. DBS&A and Hydrosphere briefly reviewed findings on water supply and demand for the region to refresh the group's memory.

Attendees first decided they would evaluate and prioritize potential alternatives by a combination of multi-voting and a decision grid process. Then the participants split into several small groups to brainstorm as many possible alternatives as they could. As the small groups reported their results, the alternatives were classified into categories. Following this exercise, alternatives from four other regions were made available and participants were advised that any of these alternatives could be added to the Socorro-Sierra list. A subcommittee of volunteers from the Steering Committee was formed to refine and clarify the alternatives proposed.

#### *2.2.1.5 June 20, 2002 Public Meeting/Steering Committee Meeting in Truth or Consequences*

This second Year 2 meeting was attended by approximately 20 persons. The project team reviewed the percentage of current water consumption by user and reported on progress made between the first and second Steering Committee meetings. The Alternatives Subcommittee presented their revised list of alternatives reorganized into seven categories. In addition, a second list of some of the same alternatives had been chosen by the SSPA consulting firm as feasible for modeling the potential amount of water saved. Both lists were posted on the wall and printed in handouts. Meeting participants further refined and prioritized alternatives by discussing and clarifying the alternatives in each list, adding or revising alternatives, and then voting their priorities.

#### *2.2.1.6 October 24, 2002 Steering Committee Meeting*

More than 20 persons from both counties participated in ranking more than 40 water use alternatives by a decision matrix. In the interim since the previous meeting, SSPA, consultants to the ISC, had scored the alternatives on how well they met criteria relating to impacts on the



hydrologic system, and the project team had supplemented the hydrologic impact scores with preliminary scores regarding the technical, financial, and legal feasibility of each alternative on a scale of 1 to 5. Meeting participants scored the alternatives on the two remaining criteria (impairment/public welfare and support by political leaders), decided what weight each criterion should have, and in some cases made adjustments to project team scores. Scores were then added by computer and the top alternatives were recorded on flip charts on the wall. Attendees compared these with those prioritized at the June 2002 meeting to arrive at a final list for in-depth evaluation.

#### *2.2.1.7 April 17 / April 22, 2003 Public Meetings*

At these meetings, held in both Truth or Consequences and Socorro, DBS&A presented a slide show that reviewed the alternative selection and evaluation process and described which alternatives would receive a full evaluation, based on public prioritization, and which would receive a limited evaluation or be addressed elsewhere in the plan. Sites Southwest recorded comments as participants discussed the potential water savings and implications of each alternative, including social or public welfare implications, political feasibility, potential environmental impacts, and implementation issues. Participants then had the opportunity to discuss and remove from mention in the plan alternatives that received lower scores.

#### *2.2.1.8 August 18, 2003 Steering Committee Meeting*

This meeting gave Steering Committee members and the public a final chance to revise the alternatives, as well as actions and parties recommended to carry them out, before they were included in the draft water plan to be circulated to the public. The group also discussed issues of public welfare and decided to include a simple statement on it in the final plan. The timetable for the process leading to final approval of the plan was also discussed.

### **2.2.2 Communication with the Public**

The project team communicated with the public primarily through a mailing list and press releases/articles in newspapers and radio broadcasts. A mailing list of Steering Committee members and other stakeholders in the planning region has been maintained throughout the water planning effort. The initial mailing list of Steering Committee members was expanded by



adding names and addresses of everyone who signed in at a Steering Committee or public meeting. This ever-evolving list has been used to notify the entire stakeholder group of public meetings as well as documents available for review.

In addition, press releases announcing each quarterly Steering Committee meeting and each public meeting were faxed to newspapers and radio stations in the region (*El Defensor Chieftain, Magdalena Mountain Mail, Valencia New-Bulletin, The Desert Journal, The Herald, the Sierra County Sentinel*, KARS, KCHS, KMXQ). Press releases and corresponding articles that were clipped are found in Appendix C. In addition, notices for public meetings were posted at a number of locations in each county, and display advertisements were placed in newspapers. Steering committee members and other stakeholders also helped spread the word about public meetings.

In addition, three-ring notebooks with labeled dividers were distributed to both the Socorro and Sierra County SWCDs to hold copies of all project documents for public inspection. Pre-addressed comment sheets, which could be folded and mailed, were distributed at each quarterly Steering Committee meeting and public meeting. Attendees were encouraged to fill them out and return them at their convenience.

## **2.3 Public Welfare**

According to New Mexico water law, transfers of water are allowed only if they do not impair existing water rights and are not contrary to conservation or public welfare. The public welfare consideration is intended to protect New Mexico water resources. Public welfare, however, has not been defined on a statewide level. Based on the input from the several Steering Committee and public meetings, the Steering Committee has defined goals for the region and has discussed at length the impact of various water supply and conservation alternatives on the local community. Based on these inputs, goals, and discussions, the Steering Committee has crafted the following statement regarding public welfare in the Socorro-Sierra region.

*Public welfare in Socorro and Sierra Counties can be defined by the regional goals and alternative actions, as expressed in the Regional Water Plan and other local ordinances,*



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*regulations, and policies, to protect water resources. To preserve public welfare, water managers should consider the impact of water projects and policies on the traditional water uses and the local economy, while protecting the rights of individual water rights holders.*