

My Turn

Open letter to the Taos Valley Acequia Association

By Chris Pieper

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Dear members of the board: Our acequia community in Arroyo Seco/El Salto recently had a meeting to discuss our membership in the Taos Valley Acequia Association.

The roughly 70 members from our acequia and other acequias that attended expressed their concern and opposition to the deep mitigation wells that the TVAA continues to support. The membership demands honest representation from the TVAA that reflects our desire for a water plan that is sustainable for future generations.

Listed below are some of the primary issues with the deep mitigation wells that were discussed at the meeting:

1. The deep nontributary water the mitigation wells would be pumping is not part of the R'o Grande Compact and is not subject to the same regulation or oversight by the State Engineer's Office. What limits would be set on how much water can be extracted?

Extraction of deep nontributary water does not require a water right, only a well permit. New Mexico's Constitution declares that tributary water is public property for the beneficial use by the people of the state. Nontributary water, on the other hand, is not public property.

2. The deep water of the Taos Valley is highly alkaline and contains high levels of dissolved minerals, such as arsenic, fluoride, strontium and uranium. If this water is used for irrigation, it will cause irreparable damage to soils. If this water is added to streams, it will harm the natural ecology. The water cannot be used for livestock or human consumption.

3. The deep aquifer does contain some isolated pockets of potable water, but if that water is pumped, the negative pressure will draw in toxic water from surrounding formations. Any good water will be only temporary.

4. Filtering this water is not economically feasible. Each well would require an \$100 million reverse osmosis treatment facility and cost over \$1 million a year to operate. The treatment facilities would generate toxic waste from the filtered minerals. Disposal of the wastewater slag would be very costly. (This information came from the State Environment Department.)

5. The mitigation wells will draw down the shallow aquifer. The consequences of this would dramatically affect the quality of life in Taos for humans and natural communities. Many homes that rely on wells would have to hook up to community water systems that may become privatized in the near future.

Also, it was discussed how water conservation, soil and watershed restoration and improvements to acequia infrastructure need to be the focus of settlement implementation. This represents real investment in the future of our Taos community.

This is what the membership wants the TVAA to advocate. People want the TVAA to defend Taos from the deep extraction wells – not be complicit in the advancement of an agenda that will harm our community forever.

Thank you.

Chris Pieper

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