

Editorial Cast new light on water agreement

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Buck Johnston climbed to the top of a 60-foot drilling rig west of Taos recently and stayed there for four days through wind and snow, asking primarily for one thing: a new public conversation about an old contentious water rights case.

The tactic might be debatable, but Johnston and others with Guardians of Taos Water accomplished what they set out to do. They've put a spotlight back on a settlement that will impact water in the entire Taos Valley for generations to come or at least as long as there is any water left.

While the Abeyta case was settled years ago, fulfilling the terms of the agreement remains contentious. The case involved Taos Pueblo, the Taos Valley Acequia Association and its 55 member acequias, the town of Taos, El Prado Water and Sanitation District and 12 mutual domestic water systems. The old guard in the battle over water rights among the parties spent four decades, sometimes battling, more often negotiating, before brokering the settlement. It would be understandable if they feel the whole thing is a done deal and not worth explaining yet again to a bunch of newbies.

But they need to explain.

Johnston and many others among the water guardians, along with some elected town officials, were too young to pay attention to the Abeyta Settlement when it was being hammered out and signed. Now the parties – all of them working together as they did to reach the settlement – need to make time and space to explain the history of the settlement to this new generation of leaders. After all, these new generations are the ones who will be living with the consequences of a settlement made by their elders.

The parties should host a public open house, with maps, experts and copies of the settlement – a place where people can ask questions about Abeyta and get explanations they can understand. The parties also should find ways to keep the conversation going as new actions are taken under the settlement – perhaps a dedicated spot on Taos Pueblo's website and El Prado's Facebook page with an email where people can send questions. The town of Taos has all of the Abeyta documents housed on its website, but there's no person to call or email with questions.

The Taos News will help the effort by housing all our previous stories of the last decade about Abeyta along with new articles, maps and graphics on our website. It is there now on the homepage under a tab called Abeyta Settlement. Check it out. Send us your suggestions and questions to editor@taosnews.com.