



THE TAOS NEWS

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EDITORIAL

Plan's protracted, contentious wave now water under bridge

In a momentous gathering Wednesday (July 16) morning in Taos, the Interstate Stream Commission formally accepted the Taos Regional Water Plan.

As the last of 16 regions in the state to complete such a document, government entities in the north central tier of the state now have a lens through which to filter decisions about water in the Upper Rio Grande basin.

In addition, the plan makes funding from the state Water Trust Board available for projects on water storage or delivery; implementation of the federal Endangered Species Act; restoration and management of watersheds; flood prevention; and water conservation.

The plan, mandated by the state in order to justify water sharing with Colorado and Texas in the Rio Grande, gets a handle of how much water there is in this portion of the Rio Grande, who uses it, what local priorities are, and what future demand might be.

Yes, in many cases, these components are educated guesses — at best. And, yes, conditions such as weather or economics can render much of the future moot.

However, the mere fact that the Interstate Stream Commission and high-profile state engineer John D'Antonio ventured north from Santa Fe to hold a regular meeting in downtown Taos speaks volumes about the importance of this planning document.

Since 2003, this odyssey experienced many obstacles, not the least of which was the contentious, suspicious nature of Taosenos. A controversial water-rights transfer oversight committee — deemed by supporters as a way to keep water upstream but by opponents as officious meddling by non-users — was dropped in the latter stages of negotiations.

Also, the unrelated firing of Taos Town Manager Tomás Benavidez in January removed one of the politi-cal obstacles in the negotiations. About the same time, several vocal members of an ad hoc subcommittee moved to the background, allowing stakeholders to negotiate face-to-face with the firm assistance of a professional mediator. Nowhere in the West are acequias treasured more than in Northern New Mexico, and nowhere do people mistrust the stated intentions of downstream users more. The plan makes it crystal clear that irrigation waters are essential to the life of Nortenos, and they will do whatever they can to retain their share of Rio Grande basin flows.

The plan also carries a strong public education section that is dedicated to keeping people informed on water rights transfer, state law and future planning.

A move is under way to establish a resource center at UNM-Taos.

A whole lot of people should be congratulated for finally getting the Taos Regional Water Plan on the books, but we deign to name them for fear of missing any key contributors.

After many delays — and much public braying and name-calling — stakeholders, including local municipalities and water districts, finally settled down and took the state engineer's warning seriously: Get this done or I'll do it for you.

In the end, patience and persistence carried the day.

These are two behaviors that we don't always see on the Taos political scene, but we hope that decision makers all around Taos County will take them to heart when faced with difficult issues down the road.

Our future comfort and stability depends up it.

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