



# C O N S E R V A T I O N Current

A Newsletter Published by the New Mexico Water Conservation Alliance



## Legislature Approves Conservation Bills

Sangre de Cristo Mountains • arttoday.com

It was a good year for water conservation legislation. The 2003 Legislature approved a number of conservation-related bills that allow limited use of residential graywater, set certain requirements for municipal water suppliers, and include water conservation as a component of the state water plan.

### Graywater Use

The bill that has been the most publicized is House Bill 114, which allows up to 250 gallons of graywater a day to be used in a residential landscape. Graywater includes wastewater from showers, baths, bathroom sinks and clothes washers (except water in which diapers have been washed). The bill outlines several practices that must be followed in graywater use, mainly to protect public health. For example, graywater cannot be allowed to pond for more than 24 hours, and graywater storage tanks must be covered. Graywater use must also comply with applicable local government codes and ordinances. As a follow-up action to the legislation, the New

Mexico Environment Department has posted guidance on graywater use on its web site at <http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/OOTS/GRAY%20WATER%20IRRIGATION%20GUIDE1.pdf>.

### Municipal Conservation Plans

Another significant piece of legislation requires municipal water suppliers who provide at least 500 acre-feet of water annually for domestic, industrial, commercial or governmental uses to consider adopting codes and ordinances for water conservation and drought contingency planning. Under the direction of SB 554, water suppliers may submit water conservation plans they develop to the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer by December 31, 2005.

In addition, applicants for financial assistance from the New Mexico Finance Authority must submit a water conservation plan with their application. This requirement is also effective on December 31, 2005. An earlier, stronger

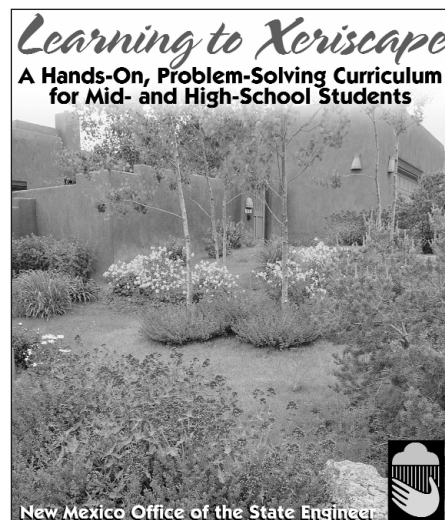
*Conservation Bills*, continued on page 2

## Xeriscape Curriculum Available Soon

The New Mexico Office of the State Engineer has announced the publication of *Learning to Xeriscape: A Hands-on, Problem-Solving Curriculum for Mid- and High-School Students*. The curriculum, thought to be the first of its kind in the country, was funded through grants from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the Xeriscape Council of New Mexico.

Recognizing that large amounts of water are used for residential and commercial landscapes, this curriculum utilizes xeriscaping as a way to introduce water issues into the classroom. It employs a problem-solving approach that allows students to participate in critical-thinking and decision-making activities, and uses xeriscaping as an integrating concept to tie science, social studies, math, and language arts into real-life situations. Composed of 361 pages, the curriculum's chapters are

*Xeriscape Curriculum*, continued on page 2



version of the bill had directed municipal water suppliers to adopt codes and ordinances instead of giving them the option to do so, and had required water conservation plans to be submitted to OSE by December, 2003.

### State Water Plan

HB 260 directs the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission to develop a state water plan, in which water conservation is included as a plan component. The language regarding water conservation is more general than that which appeared in an earlier version. The earlier language stated that water conservation should be the first water supply alternative considered. The final language requires water conservation to be considered in general terms.

### State Buildings

A joint memorial, HJM 5, directs the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer and the New Mexico General Services Department to assess the feasibility of installing water-wise native vegetation on all state properties and present a report to the Legislature by December. Although several state departments have converted their water-thirsty lawns to more water-efficient landscapes, many facilities still retain traditional landscapes which require a lot of water

### Municipal Infrastructure

Another joint memorial, SJM 18, requests that the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer and the New Mexico Water Trust Board compile information on the extent of water leakage and infrastructure problems in communities and make recommendations to the Legislature by December. Unaccounted-for water losses through distribution system leaks are big problems in some communities; and other infrastructure deficiencies contribute to water storage and delivery problems as well.

*"For many years, proponents of water conservation have maintained that the "use it or lose it" policy of New Mexico water law has discouraged conservation."*

### Water Projects

SB 841 allows funds distributed by the New Mexico Water Trust Board to be used for water conservation and water reuse. Funding criteria for these funds is directed toward infrastructure improvements, so it is not clear whether demand management activities would be eligible for funding.

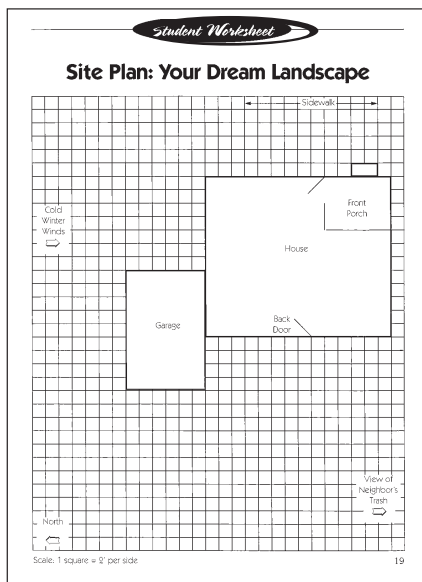
### Water Rights

Two other bills provide more flexibility in banking water and protecting water right holders from forfeiture. HB 302 gives water banking authority to acequias and community ditches, while SB 128 adds the implementation of water conservation techniques, such as drip irrigation, to the circumstances in which a water right holder is exempt from forfeiture of water rights. For many years, proponents of water conservation have maintained that the "use it or lose it" policy of New Mexico water law has discouraged conservation, and SB 128 is a beginning in addressing that concern.

### Unsuccessful Bills

A number of conservation-related bills were introduced but were not successful. This legislation included consideration of conservation techniques in building electric power plants, various tax credits and exemptions for conservation equipment sales and installation, and funding for water conservation education and research.

All of the bills that passed the Legislature have been signed by Governor Bill Richardson, with the exception of the memorials, which do not require his signature.



based upon the seven principles of xeriscaping and include background subject information for teachers and students and a wide array of hands-on classroom activities and outdoor projects.

The Office of the State Engineer will be providing a two-hour mini-workshop for

educators who would like an introduction to *Learning to Xeriscape*. The workshop will highlight teaching techniques, help locate local resources, and provide updates on the water situation in New Mexico. To request a workshop, receive more information, or be a local specialist for educators, contact Cheri Vogel at 505-827-4272 or cvogel@ose.state.nm.us.

*A sample activity sheet from the xeriscape curriculum*

*To order a free copy of the Learning to Xeriscape curriculum, call 1-800-WATERNM, email waternm@ose.state.nm.us, or download the curriculum from the OSE web page at www.ose.state.nm.us/water-info/conservation/index.html, beginning in May. In order to keep printing costs down, the curriculum will be provided on a compact disk that can be read by Adobe Acrobat, unless hard copies are specifically requested.*

# Collecting Rainwater for Irrigation

Whether you are building a new home or wanting to retrofit an existing structure, check out the potential for rainwater collection in *A Waterwise Guide to Rainwater Harvesting*, a new brochure published by the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer.

The brochure describes how rainwater can be collected and distributed, includes colorful diagrams of simple and complex rainwater harvesting systems, and explains the steps in designing and building a system. The brochure also notes additional information sources for more detailed guidance.

As water supplies dwindle and water rates rise, New Mexicans are becoming increasingly interested in capturing rainwater for landscape irrigation. Even in our semiarid climate, water gathered during a summer thunderstorm can result in a noticeable water supply that can be directed to trees and plants immediately, or stored for later

use. Rainwater harvesting equipment is also more readily available than ever before. Rain barrels and larger cisterns can be found at many plant nurseries, hardware supply stores and specialty businesses.

*To obtain a copy of the guide, which was produced through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, call 1-800-WATER-NM, or send an e-mail to [waternm@ose.state.nm.us](mailto:waternm@ose.state.nm.us).*

## First National Rainwater Conference

A two-day rainwater harvesting conference, with a field trip on the third day, will be held in Austin, Texas, on August 21-23. It will be the first national conference on rainwater catchment systems to be held in the United States.

State, national and international speakers will discuss the use of rainwater catchment systems for landscape, commercial

and industrial purposes, as well as for indoor use and potable supply. Rain-water harvesting supplies and products will also be displayed at the conference. The field trip will include visits to several rainwater harvesting sites, including the only known bottling plant that uses rainwater exclusively as its raw water source.

The American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association is sponsoring the conference, along with the Texas Water Development Board, Lower Colorado River Authority, City of Austin Water Conservation Program, and Texas Water Resources Institute. The registration fee for the conference is \$100, with an additional \$50 for the field trip.

*To register or find out more information, visit the association's web site at [www.arcsa-usa.org](http://www.arcsa-usa.org).*



## There's More...

### Drought Still Here

In spite of the snow and rain that graced some of New Mexico early this spring, the state remains in a drought. According to weather experts, it would take several more significant storms to see a notable reduction in drought conditions statewide. So farmers are preparing for reduced water allocations and adjusting their crop plans for the year; and municipalities are adding water use restrictions for residential and commercial water users, or keeping in force the ones they put into place last year. In the state capitol, the New Mexico Drought Task Force will be addressing the continuing impact of the drought upon these and other areas, such as wildfires, wildlife and tourism. Meanwhile, everyone is hop-

ing for a wetter-than-usual spring and that some of the predictions for next fall and winter are wrong – that a dryer-than-normal weather pattern called La Niña will reoccur.

### Children's Water Festival

For two days in March, more than 500 fourth-grade school children from the Santa Fe area learned all about water from a variety of hands-on educational activities presented to them at the Sweeney Convention Center. For example, teams of students worked to put together a puzzle to create the most perfect river, met a water wizard, played Water Jeopardy, and used a watershed model to learn how sediment, pesticides and oils from parking lots can pollute water. Dozens of organizations and individuals donated time, money and

other resources to make the festival possible. Another water festival is planned for the Middle Rio Grande area in October, the fifth one to be held in Albuquerque.

### WaterWiser Makes Presentations Available

If you did not get to the water conservation workshop sponsored by the American Water Works Association in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida in February, you can still access some of the presentations made there. They are posted in the WisierWatch section of the WaterWiser water conservation web site at [www.waterwiser.org](http://www.waterwiser.org). Also, keep on the lookout for a totally redesigned and improved WaterWiser site some time in May. The redesign is intended to add content and make the site easier for users to navigate.

### Santa Fe Paints Potties

Discarded high-water-use toilets taken from Santa Fe homes and businesses as part of the city's toilet retrofit program will be used again – as art. The city's Rotary Club is sponsoring a potty painting contest, in which people who want to try their hand at potty art can pick up a toilet for a \$50 entry fee and have six weeks to decorate and return it. The entries will be judged in June; and the winner will receive a water-efficient Maytag Neptune clothes washer. Most of the approximately 10,000 toilets that were replaced by more efficient models during the city's retrofit effort were crushed to be recycled into road material, but Rotary Club members collected about 165 unbroken toilets, cleaned them and plugged them with concrete so they could be used for the contest.

# Rio Rancho Offers Rebates

Rio Rancho's Utilities Department is offering \$100 rebates to the city's residents and businesses that convert high-flow toilets and washing machines to newer, low-flow models. The rebate program is intended to help Rio Rancho residents and businesses save money and reduce indoor water consumption by providing a financial incentive to replace older, high-volume fixtures and appliances.

According to Lorri Skeie-Campbell, Rio Rancho Water Conservation Officer, "The city of Rio Rancho is making water effi-



ciency more affordable for both residents and businesses." With the average market price of new 1.6 gallons-per-flush toilets at \$165, the \$100 rebate covers over 60 percent of the cost of a new, water-efficient toilet.

Typically, Rio Rancho residents flush over 25 percent of indoor water each year, making toilets the highest indoor water-using device. "The washing machine is the second biggest water user in most households," notes Skeie-Campbell. "Water-efficient, front-loading washing machines save 15 to 25 gallons per load versus older, top-loading washing machines."

The city also offers residents free water-saving kits that include a low-flow showerhead, faucet aerators, a toilet displacement bag, and a dye tablet to check for leaking toilets. Skeie-Campbell says that a family of four utilizing the city's water-



efficient incentives and the kits should save about 70,000 gallons of water a year and see the effect in lower water and sewer bills.

Homeowners or businesses interested in participating in the rebate program should contact the city's water conservation office at 505-896-8715 to obtain application forms. They may install the toilets and clothes washers themselves or hire a plumber to do so. Skeie-Campbell noted that the city hopes to keep funding the program as long as there is sufficient demand for the rebates.



**New Mexico Water Conservation Alliance**

369 Montezuma Avenue, #149  
Santa Fe, NM 87501

The *Conservation Current* is a quarterly publication of the New Mexico Water Conservation Alliance, an organization of municipal and industrial water conservation professionals dedicated to water conservation education and networking. *Current* articles may be reprinted for use in other publications by crediting the *Current* as the source.

Newsletter co-editors are Robert Matthews and Alice Darilek. Newsletter production is funded by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation; design is provided by Kenesson Design, Inc.; and printing is by Roller Printing. Other contributors to this issue are Lorri Skeie-Campbell and Cheri Vogel.