



# CONSERVATION

# Current

A Newsletter Published by the New Mexico Water Conservation Alliance

## The Alliance Visits the Legislature

Alliance President Jean Witherspoon testified before the Interim Water and Natural Resources Committee (WNRC) last November 13th. She commended the legislature and the administration on their growing willingness to tackle serious water issues and applauded last session's conservation legislation (see Spring 2003 *Current*).

"In New Mexico," Witherspoon urged, "agua es vida," so we must focus our limited resources on the most effective and cost-efficient water-saving measures. More resources and more enforcement authority for conservation and drought are priorities, she said. Many of these programs are currently funded through the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and these funds are being sharply curtailed.

We need to use our three water-conservation tools—education, regulation and pricing—in combinations that provide the most results at the least cost.

Witherspoon added that universal metering and water-use reporting are needed to determine whether water-conservation efforts are successful.

Witherspoon concluded by observing that New Mexico is in transition from a period where water supply exceeded demand to one where demand exceeds supply. Conservation is the least expensive, quickest and most environmentally friendly way to increase supply. Water conservation, she said, is the key to New Mexico's future.



## And Legislators Visit the Alliance

Senator Dede Feldman and Representative Mimi Stewart visited the January 8th Alliance meeting. Both legislators serve on the Interim Water and Natural Resources Committee (WNRC), and neither was familiar with the Alliance before President Witherspoon's testimony last November. They came to update the board on this session's legislation and to explore how the Alliance can support the WNRC's water-conservation agenda.

Senator Feldman explained that the short 30-day session is restricted to budget, tax, and revenue matters and topics on the governor's "call." She reported on the topics being considered by the WNRC:

**Water Capital:** The Water Trust Board received \$525 million in requests this year. About \$13.2 million will be available to fund water-capital projects. The Governor has resolved to reform New Mexico's capital outlay system, to bring the big-ticket items to the fore. The water section of the Governor's *Invest New Mexico* plan goes into detail on alternative funding sources.

**Water user fees:** This is a possible source of capital funds. Under New Mexico's Constitution, water is the property of the public, but New Mexico water users do not pay the state for their water. Rep. Mimi Stewart will propose a differentiated water user's fee this session, with rates for municipal, industrial, domestic and agricultural water users. This controversial measure is included in the Governor's *Invest New Mexico* plan. (<http://www.governor.state.nm.us/Governor/Council/Infrastructure/Water.pdf>)

Rep. Stewart noted that while there is support for the water-user's fee, irrigators are generally opposed. "It will take more than a year to get it passed," she said. She suggests that anyone wishing to support this bill should talk with the members of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee.

The legislators were pleased with the Alliance board's proposal that the

*Legislators Visit Alliance, continued on page 2*

Conservation Alliance be included as an endorser of the bill, to broaden the base of support.

**Domestic Wells:** The WNRC has approved a bill increasing domestic well permit fees from \$5 to \$200. Another bill authorizing the state engineer to restrict the drilling of domestic wells in critical management areas, which did not pass last year, was not endorsed by the WNRC, but may be introduced again this year.

**Strategic river reserve:** *Think New Mexico* has proposed that the state build up a strategic reserve of water rights to address water conflicts from endangered species to compact deliveries. This might be financed by an off-the-top share of severance tax bonds or through a tax on water transfers. Their report, *¡Rio Vivo!: The Need for a Strategic River Reserve in New Mexico*, is available from *Think New Mexico*, 1227 Paseo de Peralta, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501-2758 for \$10.00 to cover printing and postage.

**Gray water:** Rep. Stewart's gray-water bill, permitting residential landscape use of gray water without a permit, passed last session. It will be moved to the Environmental Improvement Act instead of the Water Quality Act, not a substantive change.

**Water Harvesting:** The WNRC will support a bill providing for the General Construction Bureau to recommend minimum standards for rainwater harvesting in all new commercial buildings with landscaping.

**Saltcedar removal:** The WNRC has recommended continued funding for saltcedar removal, but wants half the funds to be spent on reseeding and reestablishment.

**Public utility water conservation plans:** Last year's bill requiring electric utilities to prepare water conservation plans detailing alternative water management practices, including dry cooling technologies, failed. We will probably see this bill again this year.



## Santa Fe County Adopts Rainwater Harvesting Ordinance

Santa Fe County has enacted New Mexico's first major local-government effort to conserve water by harvesting rainwater. The ordinance became effective on November 15, 2003. It will be enforced through county building permit application approvals and inspections. The ordinance does not apply to incorporated cities or towns in the county.

"Water harvesting is the collection of rainwater from hard surfaces such as roofs, patios, and parking lots that can then be reused," explained Penny Ellis-Green, staff assistant at Santa Fe County's land use department.

Harvested rainwater is an additional source of water for landscape irrigation, so it reduces demands on potable-water systems. It is available even during drought restrictions.

The new ordinance requires that water from roof drainage be caught, retained and reused. Commercial developments must collect all roof drainage into cisterns for reuse; residential developments must collect roof drainage from a minimum of 85% of roof area.

Commercial developments and residences with over 2,500 square feet of heated living space must have "underground, partially buried or insulated cisterns" as part of the mandatory collection system. For homes with heated areas under 2,500 square feet, a rainwater-catchment plan must be submitted with the building application. This plan may include rainbarrels, land grading, landscape swales, berms, or other means of harvesting the water.

Ellis-Green said "The ordinance is written pretty loosely and gives individuals quite a lot of choice. Collected water can be used in any way approved by the state." "We're asking people to think about what's going to happen with the storm water," said Ellis-Green. "We look forward to the application of this ordinance and the positive impact it will have on reducing water use at home or at work."

*To learn more about the ordinance, visit the Santa Fe County website [www.co.santa-fe.nm.us](http://www.co.santa-fe.nm.us), and click on "water conservation." Along with the ordinance, a list of guidelines for water harvesting and several schematics for various water harvesting techniques are available. Please direct all questions to the Santa Fe County Land Use Department at 986-6225 or email [water@santafecounty.org](mailto:water@santafecounty.org).*

Alliance members suggested the Interim Committee consider legislation requiring water audits in state buildings. "There is tremendous water waste in state buildings," auditors observed. Funds to audit, renovate, and train maintenance staff would also be needed. Senator Feldman replied that she would like to work on this issue with the Alliance "While costs would be high, pilot projects could be

used to show the payback period and make it easier to swallow," she said.

"The U.S. has an unprecedented deficit and it's unlikely the states will get much federal aid for water," Senator Feldman observed. "The Interim Committee is moving the legislature and the people of New Mexico forward so we can start to understand water," Rep. Stewart added.

# Water Reuse in Arizona & New Mexico

Dee Fuerst, Deputy Director of Rio Rancho Utilities Department

Members of Rio Rancho's Water Resources Plan Steering Committee, staff, and a consultant toured water-reuse facilities in Scottsdale, Gilbert, and Chandler, Arizona last fall. Their goal was to educate the committee on different types of large-scale reuse systems that have been in place for several years and have yielded successful results. Dee Fuerst participated in permitting one of Chandler's recharge facilities and is familiar with the reuse laws in Arizona.

Arizona's 1980 Groundwater Management Act sets an ambitious goal of "safe yield" from its aquifers by the year 2025. Reuse of treated effluent is a key factor in attaining this goal.

Scottsdale's Water Campus processes 10-12 MGD of effluent and Central Arizona Project water using microfiltration and reverse osmosis methods. This water is used to irrigate 22 golf courses and other sites. The campus' public art display and xeriscaping incorporate processed effluent.

Chandler uses microfiltration and reverse osmosis technology to treat 6 MGD of wastewater from an Intel plant and from one of the City's wastewater plants. The water is used for irrigation or is stored in the aquifer via injection wells. In the summer, approximately 5.5 MGD is used for irrigation and 1 MGD is recharged by injection. In the winter, these effluent deliveries are reversed.

The Town of Gilbert recharges all its effluent to a shallow aquifer through infiltration ponds at two primary nature centers, and then recovers the water from shallow wells for irrigation use. The design of these centers heavily emphasizes multi-use recreational activities and education: educational signage, botanical gardens, fishing and bird watching opportunities, hiking trails, an "archeological pit" and a playground.



Back home in New Mexico, Rio Rancho is proactively pursuing reuse as a means to conserve and extend its water supply. It has completed a Reuse Plan and is building a demonstration tertiary treatment process plant at one of its existing wastewater plants. Two new wastewater plants will incorporate the new membrane bioreactor technology, yielding high quality water that is near drinking water standards. The Reuse Plan includes storage and distribution systems, infiltration galleries and injection wells. Updates will be presented as these facilities come on line.

## Look for the Survey!

A survey will be circulated in

February to a random sample of our readership in order to determine how the *Conservation Current* is serving you. We will be looking for topics you want covered, best means of distribution (snail or e-mail?), and other comments.

*Please respond to help us target your needs!*

## Drought Task Force Efforts Made Stronger

New Mexico has stepped up its drought-planning efforts by creating a program manager position for the New Mexico Drought Task Force (NMDTF). The new program manager, Dawn Matson of the Office of the State Engineer, discussed the formation of six subgroups of the NMDTF's drinking water work group at the January Alliance meeting:

- Landscaping; George Radnovich, Sites Southwest, chair.
- Education; Alice Darilek, OSE, chair.
- Land Use; Ken Hughes, DFA, chair.
- Commercial/Industrial/Institutional; Jean Witherspoon, Albuquerque, chair.
- Ordinances and Plans; Brian Wilson, OSE, chair.
- Regional Collaboration; Keith Melton, NM Tech, chair.

These subgroups are tasked with making recommendations for incentives, policies, programs, and legislation to mitigate drought impacts. They expect to be very productive during the coming year.

The NMDTF itself includes 12 cabinet-level policy makers and reports to the Governor. Its day-to-day work is done by its five work groups and their subgroups.

Workgroups and subgroup meetings are open to the public. Comments or suggestions may be sent to the chairs of working groups through the drought task force pages on the Office of the State Engineer website [www.ose.state.nm.us](http://www.ose.state.nm.us). There you will find working group contact information, meeting dates, agendas and minutes, and information on subgroups.

## Alliance Officers

January 8th election results for executive officers of the New Mexico Water Conservation Alliance:

- Jean Witherspoon of City of Albuquerque, president;
- Richard Chapman of CTSI Corporation, vice-president;
- Cheri Vogel, education specialist at the OSE, secretary;
- Lonnie Burke of TVI, treasurer.
- Colleen Logan of Weston Solutions continues to serve as past president.



Jean Witherspoon



Colleen Logan and Cheri Vogel



**New Mexico Water Conservation Alliance**

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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.

Chris Garcia is editor of the *Conservation Current*; send article submissions and requests to [chrisgarcia@plateautel.net](mailto:chrisgarcia@plateautel.net). Production is funded by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation; design is provided by Kenesson Design, Inc.; and printing is by Downtown Printing. Thanks to Dee Fuerst for her article on p. 3, and to Jean Witherspoon, Cheri Vogel, Alice Darilek and Colleen Logan for their help.

## More...

**Water Reuse Brochure:** A concise new brochure on the use of harvested rainwater, gray water, black water, and reclaimed water provides basic regulatory requirements and contact information for builders, developers, local government officials and others. *Water Reuse in New Developments* is a joint effort of state and local water agencies and business conservation experts. It is available through the OSE, by download from their website or by calling 1-800-WATER-NM.

**N.M. Rural Water Association 26th Annual Conference** will be held in Albuquerque, March 22-25, 2004. It will include two and a half days of intensive workshops, 38 individual classes in water and wastewater operations, management, safety, governance, and distribution. The Bureau of Reclamation and OSE will co-host a special workshop on desalination of public water supply, with a tour of Intel's desalination facility. For more

information, visit <http://www.nmrwa.org/> or call 1-800-819-9893.

**Children's Water Festivals:** The 2nd Santa Fe Water Festival will be held February 18 & 19, 2004 at the Sweeney Convention Center; the 6th Middle Rio Grande Water Festival will take place in the fall of 2004. For information or to volunteer, call Festival Manager Susan Gorman, at (505) 259-7190, [H2ofest@aol.com](mailto:H2ofest@aol.com) or log on to [www.pioneerwest.net](http://www.pioneerwest.net).

**Xeriscape Curriculum Workshops** Cheri Vogel of the Office of the State Engineer has given seven workshops on the OSE's *Learning to Xeriscape* curriculum. Two more are scheduled: Alamogordo, February 28th, and the Rio Grande Nature Center, March 13th.

To attend or request a workshop contact Cheri Vogel at (505) 827-4272 or [cvogel@ose.state.nm.us](mailto:cvogel@ose.state.nm.us).

## Time to pay your fees!

Are you an Alliance member? It's that time of the year—fees are \$25 for individuals or \$250 for corporations, associations and government agencies (includes up to 10 members).

Joining the Alliance gives you voting privileges, lends support to ongoing Alliance programs, and extends Alliance outreach efforts. Please complete the information below and mail it, with a check for your membership fee, to:

NMWCA  
369 Montezuma Avenue #149  
Santa Fe, NM 87501

If you choose not to join, you are welcome to continue receiving the *Current* and to join Alliance meetings.

*Alliance meetings are held on the second Thursday of odd-numbered months, from 1-3 p.m. at locations to be announced. Check the website at <http://wrrri.nmsu.edu/wrdis/nmwca/alliance.html> for locations.*

*2004 meetings will take place on: March 11, May 13, July 8, September 9, November 4*