

MIDDLE RIO GRANDE WATER ASSEMBLY

2004-05 Annual Report

Last year, the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly's intensive, eight year effort paid off: the Middle Rio Grande's regional water plan was completed, accepted by all of the local governments in the region, and accepted by the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission.

Assembly volunteers then had a choice: disband, now that the task was done, or re-dedicate themselves to following through on the plan's implementation. Having become attuned to water issues in the basin, Water Assembly members chose the latter course. It seemed foolish to allow their collective expertise to disperse and the water plan to languish on a shelf in Santa Fe. Instead, the group agreed to disseminate the regional water plan, assist local governments in finding ways to put the water plan's recommendations into action, and perhaps most important, to continue bringing controversial and difficult water issues before the Middle Rio Grande public.

Over the course of the summer, the Water Assembly revised its mission and structure, with the goals of disseminating the plan, helping to foster its implementation, and continuing to provide information to the public about regional water issues. In the past seven months, the new Water Assembly's work has focused on several areas.

(1) Revised Water Assembly bylaws and Articles of Incorporation were approved, and an Interim Board of Directors and new officers (see list) were elected to serve until the annual business meeting in June of 2005. Regular meetings of the directors have been held since February of 2005, on the second Tuesday of every other month, from 3:00 to 5:00 PM in the Executive Board Room of the UNM Park Science Building. Executive committee meetings are held on the first and third Tuesday of each month, from 12:00 to 2:00 PM at the Environmental Health Conference Room, Union Square Building in Albuquerque. Agendas and notices of the meetings are posted on the Assembly listserv and website at www.WaterAssembly.org and the meetings are open to the public.

Officers

President: Janet Jarratt <jj@jj2people.com>

Vice President: Elaine Hebard <emhebard@unm.edu>

Secretary: Corinne Brooks <CRossBrooks@hotmail.com>

Treasurer: Bob Prendergast <rnptep@swcp.com>, then Ed Payne <ed.payne@comcast.net>

Former Chair, Ex-Officio: Bob Wessely <wessely@sciso.com>

(2) The Water Assembly continued to work with state and local government agencies such as the Interstate Stream Commission and the Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Water Resource Authority. The Interstate Stream Commission accepted the Middle Rio Grande Regional Water Plan on August 17, 2004. When differences arose between the Water Assembly and the Mid-Region Council of Governments' Water Resources Board over language contained in several significant paragraphs of the regional water plan, Assembly members rigorously defended the original wording approved by MRG constituents and local governments. By so demonstrating its commitment to public values and public process, the Assembly earned the support of the Interstate Stream Commission, and thus critical wording in the document remains unchanged.

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Water Assembly and the Mid-Region Council of Governments was officially dissolved upon completion of the water plan, but the Assembly continues its ex-officio role on the Water Resources Board. Additionally, the Assembly was assigned a seat on the Water Resources Advisory Committee, a citizen's advisory group to the new Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority. Water Assembly Vice-President Elaine Hebard was named to the Committee, and as chair of that group, is helping shape the Water Authority's rate structure, water budget and conservation program to conform to the tenets of the regional water plan.

Other members of the Water Assembly are also active in various water-related organizations. President Janet Jarratt is also Vice Chair of the Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Act Collaborative Program, and Bob Wessely is a member of the new §319 Water Quality Regional Watershed Group.

(3) A number of Water Assembly working teams were created. Those that have been active include:

Education and Outreach Team—(Contact: Kevin Bean, kevin.bean@earthlink.net) In keeping with the Water Assembly's tradition of extensive distribution of information, the Working Group made sure that a full transcription of the 2004 Annual Water Assembly on "Coping with An Urgent Shortfall Reality" was assembled and posted on the Assembly's website. An issue of the Assembly's newsletter summarizing the conference, announcing the acceptance of the water plan and the revamping of the Water Assembly went out to a mailing list of approximately 2200 residents in the region in December. Organization of the 2005 Annual Assembly began in February. Many volunteer hours are required to produce the annual program, from choosing the topic and speakers to designing, printing and mailing the public announcements, and providing refreshments and audio-visual equipment for the event. The work was carried out by members of the Outreach and Executive teams. The Water Assembly also continues to host its own website. A major accomplishment, thanks to Bob Prendergast, was posting the entire Regional Water Plan and Appendices.

Cooperative Modeling Team—(Contact: Kristan Cockerill, kristanc10@earthlink.net) With funding provided by local business under the Small Business Assistance Program, Sandia National Laboratories and the Water Assembly's modeling team modified the interactive water model developed for the MRG regional planning process to make it more user-friendly with a goal to allow it to be uploaded to the Water Assembly website. Sandia updated the model (now called the 'Collaborative Water Management Model') with the most recent data and adjustments were made to assure accuracy. The modeling team solicited and reviewed editorial comments on the program, and created an explanatory text for the benefit of the lay public, which will eventually be able to access and manipulate the model on-line. The Water Assembly's Executive Committee is conducting contractual negotiations with Sandia National Laboratories and PowerSim relative to model ownership and hosting the model on-line.

Plan Monitoring and Implementation Progress Working Team—(Contact: Ed Payne, ed.payne@comcast.net) Members devised a work plan for monitoring progress on implementation of the Regional Water Plan. The work plan is divided into three parts. The first outlines data-gathering tasks and assigns those with the highest priority to various working teams. The second section lists each of the 40 recommendations of the water plan and the measurables or figures of merit for monitoring each recommendation. It also identifies probable tasks for gathering data to support each measurable. The third part of the PMIP work plan contains notes and suggestions that apply broadly to monitoring and implementing more than one of the water plan recommendations.

Liaison Working Team—(Contact: Corinne Brooks; CRossBrooks@hotmail.com) While this team has met but once, it's purpose is to interact with the *Plan Monitoring and Implementation Progress Working Team* and appropriate staff persons at each local government so as to better understand what is necessary to be a positive help with implementation.

Executive Committee—The Executive Committee is composed of the Officers of the Water Assembly along with the immediate Past President, and is responsible for implementing policy, for managing the operations, business, property and affairs of the Water Assembly, and for keeping the Board of Directors informed of progress. The Water Assembly President serves as the Chair of the Executive Committee. This year, the Committee represented the Assembly at *Rio Grande Day* at the Roundhouse in Santa Fe in March, where they demonstrated the Collaborative Water Management Model and sought legislative support for its annual upgrade. The project became Senate Bill-965 and made it into the appropriations bill before it was cut from the final budget.

EARLY WATER BUDGET CONFIRMED

Estimates of the regional water deficit used in the regional plan were optimistic. Last December, the third phase of a study conducted by S.S. Papadopoulos & Associates for the Interstate Stream Commission on the interaction of groundwater and surface flow in the Middle Rio Grande Region confirmed what the authors of the MRG Water Budget originally calculated in 1999: that the Middle Rio Grande basin has an annual deficit of some 70,000 acre-feet. The Papadopoulos study warns that renewable supplies of both surface and groundwater are inadequate to meet current demands; that assuming a climate comparable to that of the last fifty years and present levels of water use, Rio Grande Compact debt can be expected three out of every five years; and that even if the multitude of alternatives proposed by the MRG and its neighboring water planning regions (Jemez y Sangre and Socorro/Sierra) were to be implemented immediately, the water supply situation will not begin to improve until the year 2040. The study can be found at <http://www.ose.state.nm.us/water-info/mrgwss/index.html>.

NEXT STEPS

On June 11, the Ninth Annual Water Assembly focuses on “Implementing the Regional Water Plan: Straight Talk - Our Water is Over-Allocated *Plus* Straight Action - Protect Our Future.” The Middle Rio Grande Regional Water Plan’s mission is to achieve a balance between water use and renewable supply. As noted above, the Middle Rio Grande water budget indicates that the region is engaged in annual deficit. That gap reflects a *de facto* over allocation of water in the region. New users and uses — the population is expected to double by 2050— will put additional pressures on the resource. The Regional Water Plan’s forty-three recommendations are an important beginning toward addressing this situation. At the Ninth Annual Water Assembly, community leaders will address over-allocation in regard to water plan implementation. One of the obstacles to implementing the water plan is that more water uses have been permitted than water exists to fulfill those uses. Such over-allocation, particularly in light of the budget deficit, affects all governments, businesses and citizens in the region. Though some feel it is not a regional responsibility to consider the Rio Grande Compact’s constraints since it is up to the State to ensure Compact compliance, the Water Assembly believes that all of us will be better served if we work collectively to agree on preferred strategies for achieving a sustainable balance between the uses we deem important and the supply of wet water that we must share.

A new Board of Directors will also be chosen at the Ninth Annual Water Assembly, to be drawn from six advocacy groups, including:

1. Agricultural Business and Production
2. Cultural and Historic Water Use
3. Environmental Preservation & Improvement
4. Industrial, Institutional and Business
5. Residential Water Use
6. Technical Specialty

Officers for the coming year will be elected on June 14, 2005 at the Annual Business Meeting, and will have the opportunity to set a new course for the volunteer organization, taking into account the recommendations of attendees at the Ninth Annual Water Assembly.

PROPOSED PROJECT

One project already proposed for the upcoming year is a Water Planning Decision Support System to be used by water planners, government officials, stakeholders and the general public. A Geographic Information System component to the WPDSS could provide critical information regarding potential conflicts and opportunities for water plan implementation at the local level, including the ability to test localized policy changes against the Water Plan's recommendations. The project depends on a robust team of stakeholders weighting various factors that will become layers in the GIS. The Water Assembly excels at bringing diverse interests together, having done so in the open and participatory process required to develop the Regional Water Plan.



MIDDLE RIO GRANDE WATER ASSEMBLY **POST OFFICE BOX 25862 ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87125-5862**

The Water Assembly is a non-profit, citizen-based, all-volunteer organization incorporating a broad array of water interests and knowledge. Having completed the Regional Water Plan, its continuing purpose is to assure effective implementation of the Middle Rio Grande Regional Water Plan through an open, inclusive, and participatory process so as to achieve the common interests of the people and stakeholders of the region for a sustainable water future that balances water use with renewable supply in accordance with the stated goals of the Water Plan. For information on the Plan and about the Water Assembly, see the web site at www.WaterAssembly.org.