

## Protesting ranch's water application

I am writing to lodge a protest against application RG-89943, which has been resubmitted at the invitation of the State Engineer by Augustin Plains Ranch, LLC, despite having been disallowed several times in the past by various authorities, including the Catron County Seventh Judicial District Court, and the OSE itself.

I am deeply concerned that the State Engineer, whose charge it is to manage water resources for the benefit of the citizens of the state, appears to be facilitating this application by a private corporation to remove and sell a huge amount of water from the ancient aquifer which underlies the San Augustin Plains.

There is little doubt that this world, in short order, begin to dry up private wells belonging to families who have, in some cases for generations, practiced extreme water conservation in order to preserve this precious shared resource.

In the slightly longer term, this action would reduce or eliminate flow into the Gila River system, which would have a devastating effect on one of New Mexico's most treasured wilderness areas. Additionally, hydrologists have reason to believe that the San Augustin system also provides flow into the Rio Grande River, which supports agricultural communities throughout the Rio Grande valley.

Another critical issue is land subsidence. The water in an aquifer is not like water in a bottle, which occupies the same space whether the bottle is empty or full.

An aquifer, as the State Engineer well knows, is a complex system of streams, pools, and various strata which vary from impermeable (holds water like a bucket) to permeable (more like a sponge).

When water is removed from a permeable stratum, the result is often collapse of that stratum. In other words, portions of the land surface sink.

Without extensive mapping of the aquifer, it is nearly impossible to predict precisely where subsidence might occur.

So one day, your house, or maybe one of the VLA antennae, might simply disappear into a hole in the ground.

A significant potential side-effect of subsidence is water pollution. Imagine putting your fist down in the middle of a layer cake.

All the layers get pretty mixed up. Now imagine subsidence occurring under a water treatment plant. Maybe you'd rather not.

Given the already critical shortage of water in New Mexico, it would be hard to imagine a single action that would have a more deleterious impact on the public welfare than the state's approval of this application.

Water, unlike some other natural resources like timber or minerals, is by its very nature a shared resource. In New Mexico, this is affirmed by the principle of "beneficial use", which means "take what you need but no more."

This intended to prevent one individual's taking more than his share, just because he can.

If the Augustin Plains Ranch application is approved, I fear it will set a horrifying precedent, namely that anywhere you can stick your straw in, you may take out as much water as you want.

This is not only counter to “beneficial use”, it could reduce the population of our state to corporations.

Private profit is not need, but greed, and is about as antithetical to public welfare as one can get.

For the record, our well, RG-62834, sits on the west slope of the Magdalena Mountains and is likely one of the first that would dry up if Augustin Plains Ranch has its way.

However, it is not our own well that is my primary concern. For many years, New Mexico has resisted the sellout of the west for profit. We recognize that we have a unique way of life in this state that confers intangible benefits on us all. I would hate to see that change.

*Sincerely,*

*Emily Johnson*