

A short rundown on the meeting of the Legislative Committee on Water and Natural Resources yesterday (October 26). By Carol Pittman

Nine years and counting. The project to mine water in the Plains of San Augustin just won't go away.

The proposal was front and center at the October 26 meeting of the Legislative Committee on Water and Natural Resources.

Ballroom B of the Fidel Center on the New Mexico Tech campus in Socorro was filled to capacity for the meeting that prominently featured the Augustin Plains.

In the morning, Stacy Timmons, Aquifer Mapping Program Manager, discussed New Mexico Tech's groundwater mapping in the state. Dr. Timmons explained that the mapping will show where the groundwater is, how much there is, and that their work will help to determine how long the groundwater supply will last. She pointed out that there are some areas, like the Augustin Plains, where there is not enough information, no high quality data.

Representative Tomás Salazar, District 70 San Miguel, asked if the data was relative to making decisions about the basin, and Stacy replied, "Yes." Representative Salazar then suggested that resources should be directed to places where there is a need for help in making decisions.

The afternoon meeting continued discussion of the Augustin Plains. Anita Hand, Catron County Commissioner and representing the San Augustin Water Coalition; Brett Bruton and Henry Edwards, both local ranchers, spoke of the hardships the water mining project would inflict on ranching in the Plains. They spoke eloquently on behalf of the people living in Catron County and the widespread damage the project would inflict.

Chris Lindeen, Deputy General Counsel, Office of the State Engineer (OSE), was also a member of the panel, and he reviewed the process the project would need to go through (again). Mr. Lindeen told the legislators that all protestants of the original application, as well as 150 new protestants, would be included in the process. He stated that it would probably be a year before the first hearing would be held, stating "The more protests, the longer it takes."

Senator Pat Woods, Curry, Quay and Union, District 7, then asked Lindeen, "Do you know how much water is there?" To which Lindeen responded "The previous application was dismissed based on hydrology." When pressed for details, Lindeen noted that the application's end users named were "vague". (Note: applicants for water rights must be specific as to beneficial use for an application to meet the requirements of the law)

Senator Peter Wirth noted that inter-basin transfers might not be welcome in New Mexico, that, "We really need to look at this."

Representative Candy Ezzell, Chairman of the Committee, pointed out that "if we allow movement of water like this, every rural area is threatened."

Jeff Steinborn, representative from Doña Ana District 35, noted that "Everyone has a shared interest In water. It isn't just might makes right." He further noted that "People are brought together from all persuasions to defend water."

Don Tripp, our representative on the committee, urged the room full of people to "stay involved".

A personal note to everyone receiving this note: You have stayed involved for a long time, and that's the reason we can hope to win this water battle. Thank you all.

For those of you who might like **to take some action**, a note to Senator Wirth would be helpful. In your note, you might thank him for his support and ask that he re-introduce SB 77 regarding water transfers. Here is a link to the bill for you:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Legislation/Legislation?Chamber=S&LegType=B&LegNo=77&year=14>

Senator Wirth can be reached by email at peter.wirth@nmlegis.gov The more notes the better!