

Intent of the Office of the State Engineer

12/13/16 - By Dennis Inman, Geologist

What is the intent of the Office of the State Engineer when it comes to dealing with large water withdrawals from one basin to another (inter-basin transfers)? This is a question that is on minds of the residents of the Plains of San Augustin. The notion that the transferring of water from one location to another so that that one group of people can live and prosper at the expense of another group of people is flawed thinking, to many of the rural residents in New Mexico. The Augustin Plains Ranch, LLC application for 54,000 acre feet of water annually from the Plains of San Augustin is just such a plan. And if this application is granted by the State Engineer; why wouldn't another application from this location, not be granted? Is it the intent to drain the Plains of San Augustin so that the current residents have to move somewhere else?

This brings up the question of impairment to existing wells and water rights. If rich people with political connections and influence can sway the State Engineer and his office to grant these transfers at the expense of people in rural areas and cause financial difficulties as well as drain their aquifer is this not impairment? This is something that is not supposed to happen under state statutes. When and if the LLC gets their request and the project goes forward, it is not just a matter of the local rancher and other current residents in the basin to deepen their wells. This is matter of drilling new wells to a depth of 2,000 feet to compete with the LLC's wells. This would place a financial hardship on these folks and bankrupt many others, as they do not have the financial resources that the LLC has. Is this type of activity really in the states best interest? Why would they want to harm or alienate one group of people in favor of another?

The Plains of San Augustin are already feeling the effects of a prolong draught and the existing pumping of water under the state's permit system. There are wells in the southwestern part of the plains that are showing signs of decline. With the groundwater gradient flow for the whole basin toward the southwest and the Continental Divide this does not bode well for the Gila and San Francisco Rivers which have been adjudicated under the Arizona Water Settlement Act (AWSA). This application has the potential to decrease the amount of available water to the aforementioned rivers which opens the State up for yet another water law suit. The basin is leaking groundwater at such a rate that annual rain and snow fall is NOT recharging the basin sufficiently.

So why is this application still going forward? Is there an agenda that we are unaware of, or is it just incompetence on the State's part, that 10 years later we are still dealing with this screwball application?

Dennis Inman

Geologist