

Judge nixes application to pump Socorro County water

Many oppose aquifer pumping plan Channel 7 KOAT – 11/12/15

- SOCORRO, N.M. —A judge nixed plans to pump water from a central New Mexico aquifer to the Rio Rancho area, for now, much to the delight of those in a Socorro County courtroom.

Nearly 100 people who oppose the plan supported Judge Matthew Reynolds' decision with a standing ovation.

Augustin Plains Ranch LLC submitted an application in 2007 involving a large piece of land about 5 miles west of the Very Large Array. There is a lot of water beneath the ground in an aquifer off Highway 60 near Datil.

The corporation wants to pump water through a pipeline which would bring it all the way to the Rio Rancho area. CEO Michel Jichlinski said it can help communities combat drought.

"A lot of communities along the pipeline are going to benefit from very, very cheap and very good water," Jichlinski said. "We have been trying and are continuously trying very very hard to have conversations with [the people in the Datil area]. There has not been a lot of openness to that."

There are several groups who oppose the pumping plan, including the San Augustin Water Coalition. Founding member Carol Pittman said the pumping would be detrimental to the water table and harmful to vegetation and animals.

"It's a way for a corporation to make money at the expense of good science," Pittman said.

The company dealt with denials to its original application and submitted a second, more detailed application in 2014. It needs approval from the office of the state engineer to proceed.

"What the judge did this afternoon was making it clear to everyone that the old application was done and doesn't exist anymore," Jichlinski said Thursday. "We're looking forward to it moving to a hearing so that we can really present the benefits of this project."

Pittman said she was surprised by the ruling, but pleased.

"The decision that Judge Reynolds made gave us a chance to fight again because (the original application) was not sent back to the state engineer," Pittman said.

Jichlinski said it could take two years for an outcome on the new application. If approved, he said it will take about six years to build the wells and pipeline.

Though the case has been going on for eight years, the judge feels this is just the beginning.