

Brief report on the San Augustin Water Coalition Annual Meeting

The SAWC annual meeting April 29, 2017 was a very good meeting. Those of you who were there will agree (I think) and those of you not there - sorry you missed the meeting. Here's a brief summary.

Three speakers brought the assembled audience up to date in different ways.

Stacy Timmons, hydro-geologist from New Mexico Tech, and Program Manager for the Aquifer Mapping Program, spoke about the progress her team has made as it relates to the Plains of San Augustin.

Catron County Commissioner Anita Hand discussed impairment.

Gail Armstrong, our new representative to the New Mexico House of Representatives, brought us up to date on the political situation that boils around the water issues of the Augustin Plains.

Stacy Timmons explained that the geology of New Mexico is very complicated and that discovering the location and quality of water in underground basins is not easy. The effort at the Bureau of Geology where Ms. Timmons works is to put together a hydrogeologic conceptual model defining the aquifers of the state.

She pointed out that the trend has been toward fewer and fewer water level measurements. This trend exists at a time when there is evidence of less water and a greater demand on groundwater. To correct that trend, Ms. Timmons and colleague Sara Chudnoff are asking the public to participate in Collaborative Groundwater Monitoring. The attached flyer explains what people can do to monitor their own wells and gather data.

In view of our very real concern about the effect of drilling proposed in the Augustin Plains basin, this kind of data can be very helpful to ourselves as well. Monitoring our wells now can give us valuable information on current water levels and provide a basis for declaring impairment should pumping by the Augustin Plains Ranch's project affect our wells.

Impairment: a word that describes damage of some kind. Unfortunately, as Catron County Commissioner Anita Hand explained, impairment is a vague term as it relates to well water levels. It seems that no one wants to be specific about the definition, letting it remain a judgment of the State Engineer. Commissioner Hand is trying to change that. I will keep you informed about ways you can support that effort.

For a more complete rundown on issues discussed by Commissioner Hand, see her article in the current issue of the Catron Courier.

Gail Armstrong described her efforts to get a bill through the recent legislative session regulating applications to transfer large quantities of water from a local area. She explained that the bill she wrote went through several changes in order to meet the State Engineer's criteria, and that the session ended before the finished bill could be heard. Having garnered bipartisan support, Representative Armstrong will try to get her bill through the next session of the New Mexico Legislature. Once again, this is an effort you can support, and I will keep you in the loop.

Carol Pittman.