

**Middle Rio Grande Water Advocates  
President's Annual Report  
July 1, 2019**

The Water Advocates worked in several areas which include:

- Managing the organizational transition from “Assembly” to “Advocates.”
- Monitoring ISC Water Planning activities
- HM1 Working Group Participation
- *Making the Case for Change*
  - Council
  - Advocacy
- Rio Grande New Mexico Basin Study participation
- MRCOG Database Project
- Healthy Soils Act
- Information Exchange

This was a year of getting organized and of exercising our first advocacy process(es). The Board determined more than a year ago that the organization’s role as a neutral convener (“Assembly”) on sensitive Middle Rio Grande regional water plan issues was ineffective in achieving desired impacts to protect and assure the sustainability of the region’s or the state’s water resources. So last year we decided instead to become an activist organization (“Advocates”) focused on making substantive improvements in planning processes and outcomes.

**Managing the Organizational Transition** – The conversion from a convening role to an advocacy role is proving more challenging than we had expected. Functionally, we are continuing to work on determining how we choose and pursue advocacy targets. A set of policy objectives is in progress, as are the ground rules for choosing to pursue specific target within those policy objectives. Our quest for organizational allies remains substantially idle. Several administrative tasks such as selecting a new logo and a set of bylaw changes were accomplished.

**Monitoring ISC Water Planning Efforts** – The Water Advocates as an organization, and several participants as individuals, submitted comments regarding the draft 2018 State Water Plan. That draft plan, as well as the later-issued final State Water Plan are seen to be essentially laundry lists of water-related facts and ideas. Most of our substantive comments were rejected by the ISC with an indication that they were “out of scope”. That reflected the state’s parsimonious approach to planning for effective future water availability and use. As best we can tell, the “completed” Regional Water Plans developed by the ISC continue to gather dust.

**HM1 Working Group Participation**– Several members of the Water Advocates are and have been participating heavily in the activities of the House Memorial 1 Working Group. That Group is devoted to fulfilling the request in 2017 House Memorial 1 to develop a proposal on how New Mexico’s water planning for the future should be accomplished and made effective. The Group developed a proposal, *Making the Case for Change*, (see below) that identified four overarching water problems that New Mexico faces, and five core initiatives to address those problems. The Group proposed three legislative measures to achieve those ends. These bills were heard in several committees but did not pass. The HM1 Working Group is currently trying to work with OSE to resolve conflicts and gain support for future legislative sessions.

**Making the Case for Change** – The House Memorial 1 Working Group developed a white paper entitled “*Making the Case for Change*”. It identified four major water problems that the state faces, but has not

faced up to. The paper also described five core initiatives that together would address the four problems. The Water Advocates' Board determined to pursue *Making the Case for Change* as a primary focus for its near-term advocacy.

**Council** -The Water Advocates sponsored a Council in November 2018 attended by about 50 members of the general public. The Council explored the nature and implications of the issues and core initiatives in *Making the Case for Change*, and (besides electing a new Board) recommended advocacy approaches.

**Legislation** – The HM1WG wrote three bills--HB187, SB558, and SB560—to implement the recommendations of *Making the Case for Change*. The Water Advocates were actively involved in encouraging the 2019 Legislature to pass those bills, including operating a booth during the Lands, Water and Wildlife Day at the Roundhouse. Unfortunately, the Legislature did not follow the encouragement. However, the Advocates appreciate that Rep. Melanie Stansbury's Water Data Bill did pass. We are looking forward to implementation success.

**Rio Grande New Mexico Basin Study participation** – The Water Advocates continue to work with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and others on the New Mexico Rio Grande Basin Study. That is a program to bring water stakeholders and interested parties together to establish and use a shared technical basis on which to plan for a sustainable water future, from the NM/CO border to Elephant Butte Dam. We provided comments on a draft Memorandum of Agreement, participated in a “kick-off” meeting of actual and potential participants, and provided critique of an updated MOA. We understand that BoR will soon distribute a “final” MoA for all participants, including the Water Advocates, to sign. One of the Water Advocates' bills (SB558 2019) provided for building on the results of the basin study to create a water plan for the entire Middle Rio Grande (Otowi gage to Elephant Butte Dam) emphasizing living within our legal apportionment.

**MRCOG Database Project** – The Mid-Region Council of Governments' Water Resources Board has embarked on a project to develop an updated regional water budget describing the region's sources and depletions of water resource. The intent is to have a technical vehicle against which progress in balancing water use with renewable supply can be measured. The Water Advocates participated in several meeting whose thrust was to obtain existing information on data sharing methods.

**Healthy Soils** – The Water Advocates played a supporting role in causing passage of the Healthy Soil Act. That act promotes and supports farming and ranching systems and other forms of land management that increase soil organic matter, aggregate stability, microbiology and water retention to improve the health, yield and profitability of the soils of the state.

**Information Exchange** - Our quarterly Board meetings continue to be a forum to exchange information. Mike Marcus has been attending the Endangered Species Collaborative Program's various workshops, etc., and has provided insights with respect to that process.

**Overall**– We are looking forward to the next year to maintain and enhance the momentum for dealing properly with our water situation in the Middle Rio Grande Region, as well as in the State of New Mexico. We see a critical part of this task to be better engaging the public and decision-makers in addressing the difficult actions that will be needed.

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Wessely, President