

LFC Interim Meeting, Roswell NM, May 19th, 2020

Water Policy and Infrastructure Planning Task Force

I am Greg Alpers, Chairman of the PVACD. I have lived in the Pecos Valley since 1968. My working life has been 100% involved with Agriculture including farming myself. My expertise is with rangeland health and brush control. I believe Ag is the backbone of our society.

I am speaking on behalf of the constituents of the PVACD, be they Ag users, Oil and Gas, Dairy, municipal and industrial.

The PVACD was created by District court order on Sept 8th, 1931. We are a ground water district. Our charge is to conserve, preserve and protect the waters of the Roswell Artesian Basin as defined by a USGS hydrologic survey in the early 20's. we have mill levy authority.

To meet the mission and purpose of the PVACD, it has successfully accomplished the following:

- We have funded, installed, and maintained the metering on some 1400 irrigation wells in the RAB.
- We have funded the OSE for the cost of a local Water Master who reads the meters to make sure that the wells are not distributing too much water (currently limited to 3.5 a-f/yr.
- We have plugged abandoned or leaking wells to preserve the integrity of the aquifer.
- Since the metering order was implemented, the constituents of the PVACD have switched from flood irrigation to sprinkler and drip irrigation.

- Also since the metering order was implemented, the constituents of the PVACD have switched from a low water use crop rotation of cotton and alfalfa to a high water use rotation of corn and small grains double cropped with pecans and alfalfa.
- We have invested in our infrastructure and cutting edge technology, such as Telemetry to report water usage and updating our data recording and reporting systems to match the OSE systems to offer more transparency and efficiency.
- Through our Conservation Loan Program, we have loaned \$30,000,000 since 1958 to fund water conservation projects in the PVACD.
- We have abided by and upheld the Pecos River Compact and the Pecos River Settlement Agreement.
- Since the initiation of the New Mexico water adjudication process, the PVACD has purchased and dried up some 17,000 acres of farm land.

Currently, the PVACD has some 110,000 acres under cultivation, while its downstream surface water neighbor, the Carlsbad Irrigation District (the CID), has some 15,000 acres under cultivation. We are using the same amount of water now that we used in the early 1970's and have at least quadrupled the Agricultural economic output of the Pecos Valley. All the while keeping the basin in balance.

This is a huge testament to the Board members and producers of the PVACD. Board members way before my time are to be credited with their foresight. Our water levels are for the most part on par with those in the 1970's. However, we are under a constant threat of a Priority Call on the river.

To remedy the threat of a Priority Call, we have purchased, and will continue to purchase, irrigated land in both the PVACD and the CID. To date, we have purchased some 2,200 acres in the CID and spent some \$19 million dollars to accomplish this. The water we purchased in the CID, however, is not used by us. We leave it in Brantley Reservoir for CID to use, and we pay the CID their assessment fees like any other water right holder. So, CID members get the benefit of our water.

A Priority Call would be devastating to the PVACD, other upstream users such as the Fort Sumner Irrigation district, and the entire economy of the RAB. We do not want this to happen, we want CID to remain whole and we will comply with the Pecos River Compact and the Settlement Agreements. There is no one more vested in the health of the Pecos River system than the PVACD.

So, I bring to you some ideas on infrastructure that can help keep the system in balance:

#1 Fully fund the Office of the State Engineer. Mike is working hard to deal with the issues that fall to the OSE. However, he is understaffed. For Mike to do his job he needs people. He has litigation, relation back issues, adjudication, much needed technology upgrades in data collection and monitoring as well as compact compliance to deal with. Mike and his staff are making a valiant effort but he needs help. He needs resources to plan for the long haul. Mike has jumped in with both feet and is trying to swim upstream right now.

#2 Brantley Reservoir, just upstream of Carlsbad, is the structure thru which CID gets their irrigation water. Brantley is a Reservoir that can hold 400,000 acre-feet. We are currently bound by law that allows us to only hold 40,000 feet. This needs to change. The Pecos River can experience heavy inflows due to flood events. It can be feast or famine.

Such as happened last summer. It was very dry early, then the rains came. Inflows to Brantly exceeded the legal holding capacity, while the ICS/State of NM was pumping augmentation wells into Brantley. This resulted in spilling water to Texas while CID was short of water. In fact, Craig Ogden, President of the NM Farm Bureau who is on the tail end of the CID system, could not get water. This is foolish. I believe that an agreement can be worked out with Texas to allow more water storage in Brantley. It would seem that if Brantley holds more water, that NM would be in a better position to meet our obligated delivery requirement at the State line. Let's not waste water, let's allow for increased storage in Brantley in an effort to keep everyone whole.

#3 The State should develop an Insurance program for CID. Such insurance is available and is USDA Federally backed. Surface water districts in south Texas use these programs. Most growers in the Pecos Valley take advantage of these programs. My simple thought is for the State to write a Conservation Grant to CID and let CID administer the program internally. PVACD by owning water rights in the CID are members of CID so we have skin in the game. We, the PVACD could choose to start farming on our 2200 acres. While I understand that most CID growers would rather have wet water, when the river does not deliver, this could possibly be an option to help keep them whole.

#4 As a member of the CID, PVACD would like to see infrastructure investment in canal linings for the CID main canal. Coley Burgess, the CID manager has some very creative ideas on canal lining. The current delivery system is very inefficient.

#5 Investment in Watershed Projects. Such as what the SLO is doing on Hernandez Draw NE of Roswell. This area drains into the Pecos. The removal of salt cedar, mesquite and one seeded juniper will put more water in the ground. A 30% coverage of an acre by mesquite or one seeded

juniper reduces water yield by 50%. Think about precipitation on a hot summer day or snow on a winter day, the moisture that is hung up in the tree canopy evaporates and is lost. The other benefits of landscape scale projects are reduced sheet erosion (think silting in of rivers), reduction of catastrophic wildfire potential, increased species diversity of plant, wildlife and insects, think pollinators. A worthy investment of dollars. The other benefit of watershed restoration is that an acre of grass puts more carbon in the ground than an acre of trees. Cattle convert grass, lignin and cellulose which are indigestible by humans, into a high quality protein.

#6 Fund a position in the OSE for a Water Bank. What is a water bank? In our simple view it is, in wet years to put water back into agriculture production on an annual lease. A benefit to the local and State economy. Whether these acres are owned by PVACD, another entity or an individual, allow them to hold or lease to others. In a dry year, (parameters are involved) the ability to use this water is curtailed. The PVACD's Superintendent, Aron Balok has some good ideas on this.

So, I close by saying that the PVACD will continue to look at ways to become more efficient and conserve the waters of the RAB. We will continue to purchase farm land where it fits our model. We will do everything we can do to avoid a Priority Call which would be devastating to every water user on the Pecos system, up and down stream. A PC would take years to work thru the court system and cost who knows how much. To what gain? So, we all spend a lot of money and get no wet water. The PVACD is committed to working with all parties. We are also committed to the Compact and Settlement Agreement. I will end by quoting Engineer Hamman "Time to roll up our sleeves and get to work."

Thank You

Greg Alpers