

New Mexico's Strategic Water Reserve

Reaching the Reserve's full potential to benefit communities & the environment



Healthy rivers are central to New Mexico's environment, communities, culture, and economy. With a 25% reduction in streamflow expected by 2050, meeting our state's water needs is only getting harder, and rivers are feeling the strain.

New Mexico's Strategic Water Reserve can help protect our rivers, but we must make sure it has the structure and resources it needs to succeed.

Water can't wait.

It's time to take action to protect New Mexico's rivers.

Supporting the Strategic Water Reserve

In 2005, an overwhelming majority of the New Mexico Legislature voted to create the Strategic Water Reserve to secure the future of the state's water supplies. The Interstate Stream Commission administers the Reserve and may:



Buy, lease, or accept donated water rights from willing sellers, lessors, or donors for the Reserve



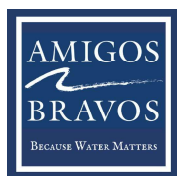
Use water in the Reserve to comply with interstate river agreements or compacts



Use water in the Reserve to benefit threatened or endangered species or prevent future listings

The Strategic Water Reserve is an important water management tool that allows New Mexico to incentivize water conservation, prevent water shortages, protect wildlife, and avoid litigation.

However, we must update the Strategic Water Reserve statute (NMSA 72-14-3.3) to address funding challenges, administrative barriers, and program limitations before we can realize the Reserve's full potential.



Realizing the Reserve's Full Potential

Solutions

1. Provide long-term funding.

The Reserve is chronically underfunded. From 2005 to 2022, only \$8 million was appropriated and just half of this money stayed in the Reserve long enough for the state to spend it, as water rights can take years to purchase or lease.

Water rights acquisitions simply do not make single year funding a reasonable possibility. A non-reverting fund is needed for the Reserve so that water rights sellers or lessors can rest assured that they will be paid for their water.

The consequences of coming up short were brought to light when a closing dairy in Socorro wanted to sell its water rights to the Reserve. This water would have flowed through the Bosque del Apache, providing critical habitat to migratory birds and supporting local tourism. It also would have helped the state meet its obligations under interstate water agreements. Unfortunately, New Mexico lost out when the seller moved on to another buyer because the state did not have sufficient funding in-hand.

We cannot expect families, small businesses, and other water rights holders to sell or lease their water to the Reserve without guaranteed compensation from the state.

2. Reduce the administrative burden on willing sellers and lessors.

It is currently easier for water rights holders to sell their water to the oil and gas industry, a golf course, or a cannabis grower than it is to sell to the Strategic Water Reserve. We must streamline the due diligence requirements and transaction process so that the Reserve is competitive.

3. Allow the Reserve to benefit outdoor recreation.

The Reserve is currently limited to providing water for federally listed threatened or endangered species, preventing new species listings, and maintaining compliance with interstate river agreements. Adding recreation to this list would allow the state to protect fishing, ensure boating access, and support New Mexico's outdoor recreation economy. This would help build new partnerships and ensure our communities get the most out of every drop of water in the Reserve.

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