

New Mexico Must Invest in Water Infrastructure

By Senator Pete Campos and Secretary-Designate of Environment Ryan C. Flynn

In November, Governor Susana Martinez asked the legislature to allocate 60 percent of the available capital outlay, or \$112 million, to water infrastructure projects throughout New Mexico. The governor's proposal is to fund projects that will improve watersheds and rivers, provide a clean supply of drinking water to New Mexico's communities, make critical repairs to dams and invest in water research at our state's public universities.

As Governor Martinez has correctly observed, the drought we continue to experience and the fires and floods over the past few years have revealed glaring water and flood control infrastructure problems throughout the state. By working with the governor in a bipartisan fashion during the legislative session, the legislature can continue addressing our critical water infrastructure needs and help ensure the viability of New Mexico's communities.

As we witnessed this past summer in the central New Mexico community of Magdalena, the threat of a water shortage looms for many communities lacking the basic infrastructure necessary to prevent them from going dry at any moment. Vaughn is another community that was left without water for several days when the line supplying water to its residents broke. Capital outlay funds can help communities like Magdalena and Vaughn rehabilitate their water systems and identify new sources of water to ensure long-term water security.

In Las Vegas and Ruidoso, we have witnessed watersheds devastated by fires and floods, significantly affecting overall water quality and threatening those communities' water supplies. By funding needed projects like Bradner Dam in Las Vegas, we can triple the city's water storage and bring needed water shortage relief to the residents of the community. Capital outlay funds can be used to improve watersheds damaged by fires and improve habitat for wildlife.

Naturally occurring contaminants in water, such as arsenic and uranium, pose a serious threat to the safety and well-being of New Mexicans, especially those in rural areas. More than three dozen communities across the state are struggling to provide clean drinking water to their residents. Capital outlay funds can be used to ensure that each and every New Mexican has access to a clean supply of drinking water.

Capital outlay funds can also help restore dilapidated dams, such as the Power Dam near

Santa Rosa, which has been neglected for far too long, and rivers and streams, such as the Rio Grande and Rio Chama, which are being affected by fires, floods and drought.

While we cannot dictate the duration or magnitude of the drought, or guarantee that we will not experience another difficult wildfire season, we can dictate our response to these challenges. Water needs currently exist in every corner of the state, and capital outlay dollars should be spent on projects that build critical infrastructure, eliminate public health threats and provide solid foundations for economic growth. The stakes are simply too high to allow another year to pass without making a significant investment in our state's water infrastructure.

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