

# PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release – February 2, 2009

Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly  
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Public Forum

## **Desalination: Silver Bullet or Pipe Dream?**

**Saturday, February 21, 2009**

UNM Continuing Education Center – 1634 University Boulevard NE

**9:00 am to 1:00 pm**

Registration begins at 8:30

Registration Free: continental breakfast & snacks are included  
Just north of Indian School on the east side of University Blvd. - free parking

**Lake Superior has once again appeared here under the desert.  
Large quantities of deep brackish water have been found.  
Our water worries are over! Or are they?**

A Public Forum Will

Air the Promises, Perils, and Controversy

Regarding the Desalination of Deep Saline or Brackish Water for Supplying Our Drinking Water

### Presentations

**What is desalinated water?**

**What's being proposed?**

**In-depth Perspectives:**

- Business Viewpoints
- Economic Considerations
- Regulatory & Legal Issues
- Environmental Impacts

- Ethical Issues to be Considered

Public Discussion:

**What policies might be needed?**

## **Background on the Middle Rio Grande Water Situation**

During 2004 the Regional Water Plan for Sandoval, Bernalillo and Valencia Counties was accepted by all local governments in the Region and by the State of New Mexico. It showed a substantial gap -- about 20% -- between consumptive water use in the Region and renewable water supply. The mission of the Plan is to "Balance Water Use with Renewable Supply." The Plan contains an array of recommended actions to close that gap, as developed by citizens representing widely diverse stakeholder viewpoints.

While conservation measures have certainly been undertaken, the 'gap' is still with us. Since that time, there are many new residents, and plans for several large new communities that are projected to double the population by 2050. Agricultural land is being 'retired,' but the end result is often *more* regional water use, not less. The regional water plan did not address the water needs of the Rio Grande itself, or those of its aquatic and riparian inhabitants. Most troublesome of all, our planning strategies were based on an unusually wet quarter century, while warming climate may mean considerably less precipitation, and a change in when it comes. In short, the region does not have sufficient water to cover current uses, much less new ones.

### **Desalination: Silver Bullet or Pipedream?**

Recent studies by Sandoval County and others have reveals the existence of deep aquifers, primarily many tens of thousands of feet under the west mesa. These aquifers have been measured to contain large but limited quantities of very salty water. Technology has advanced to a point where that brackish water under ultra-high pressure can be segregated into a pure stream of potable water and a highly concentrated stream of waste.

The quantities of water thus available could serve a substantial part of the projected population growth in the Region – until the limited aquifers run out. Energy (including dollar and water use) costs of purifying that water will be substantial. Environmental costs or impacts of the disposing of the large waste stream are considerable. What, if any, effect will pumping of that brackish aquifer have on the use of fresh water aquifers of the Region? At the February forum, experts from various perspectives will discuss the pros and cons of this possibly practical water source. Attendees will be asked to recommend any new or revised policy actions.

### **Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly – [www.WaterAssembly.org](http://www.WaterAssembly.org)**

The Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly has a reputation for initiating dialogue on tough and controversial topics – presenting diverse viewpoints and soliciting all input. The Water Assembly is an independent, all volunteer, grass roots, not for profit organization that was established in 1997. It was formed in response to a request from the State Engineer to the University of New Mexico to set up an independent entity for water planning in the region. The Water Assembly was the prime participant in organizing and conducting the open and inclusive public process that led to the Regional Water Plan. Working with the Water Resources Board, the Water Assembly conducted more than 100 public input meetings, a similar number of briefings to agencies, technical analyses and modeling on Assembly and government funds, and well over 30,000 volunteer person-hours.

### **University of New Mexico Water Resources Program – [www.unm.edu/~wrp](http://www.unm.edu/~wrp)**

The Water Resources Program (WRP) offers the Master of Water Resources (MWR) degree, an interdisciplinary professional degree designed to prepare students for careers in water resources management and related fields. The University of New Mexico's location in the Southwestern USA means that there is a natural emphasis on dry-region water issues; however, the MWR degree is designed to provide its students a firm grounding in water resources that is applicable throughout the world. The MWR degree is generally directed towards students wishing to further develop their qualifications and expertise in the practice of water resources management. Therefore, although it does include considerable exposure to research topics and methods in this area, its principal orientation is towards practice rather than research.