

Abstract for Proceedings  
Projected Demand and Available Supply in New Mexico Water Planning Regions  
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In 1987, a federal court ruled that New Mexico could not prohibit water from being exported to Texas unless New Mexico had a plan for using the water. Shortly thereafter, the New Mexico legislature began funding the development of regional water plans to assess the projected water demand for 16 regions covering the entire state of New Mexico. Projected demands in these regions were compared to available supplies, and in most areas shortages are anticipated either at all times or, at a minimum, during drought conditions. The water planning efforts show not only that New Mexico needs all available water, but also that projected future demands cannot all be met with existing supplies. By 2040 the statewide water demands (withdrawals) for the public, commercial and industrial sectors are projected to increase by more than 500,000 acre-feet per year (ac-ft/yr) over the amount used in 2000. Ranges of projected changes in the agricultural sector (based on high and low projections), for which more than 70 percent of the states' water resources are currently diverted, indicated moderate declines to moderate increases.

The Jemez y Sangre region provides an example of some of the shortages that are anticipated around the state. In this region, which includes the Santa Fe area, rapid growth combined with limited supplies has led to the need for comprehensive conservation, conjunctive use, watershed management, and other strategies for meeting the needs of the regions. Similar concerns regarding supply and demand are observed throughout the state. Improved storage and watershed management can help to protect existing supplies and reduce vulnerability during drought periods, but few options exist for new supplies. Options for balancing supply and demand include reducing demands through conservation and growth management, and transferring water rights from agriculture to supply increasing municipal and industrial demands. The latter option raises some conflicts among the regions, as most plans recommend protecting agriculture and limiting water transfers outside of the region, while municipalities are under pressure to find additional water rights, which are predominantly held by agricultural water users.

The regional water plans achieved their goal of demonstrating New Mexico's need for all of New Mexico's water. However, the plans do not prescribe any enforceable means of ensuring that the gap between supply and demand will be met as communities continue to grow.