
AWRA 2011 ANNUAL WATER RESOURCES CONFERENCE
Albuquerque, New Mexico

November 7-10, 2011

Copyright © 2011 AWRA

INSTITUTIONAL OBSTACLES TO INCREASING NEW MEXICO'S WATER SUPPLY

Sigmund Silber*

ABSTRACT: As measured by precipitation per acre, New Mexico is the fifth driest state in the lower 48 states. But measured as precipitation per capita, we are in the upper quartile with about 50 acre feet of precipitation per capita. This translates into close to 100 million acre feet of precipitation per year for New Mexico yet our annual water budget is under 4 million acre feet a portion of which originates in Colorado. New Mexico also has enormous underground water resources along the Rio Grande River which is a rift valley that has developed very deep sediments which in many cases are filled with water both fresh and brackish. This raises the question of why a State which has such enormous water resources is in a permanent state of water shortage. Reasons include: A. Expecting entrepreneurs to invest in technology but then still be required to purchase a water right. That is a big (crushing) obstacle to investment in water development. B. Inhibiting water conservation in agriculture by concluding that the saved water is not able to be utilized by the farmer or transferred to municipal use. B"; is similar to ";A"; but on the water conservation side. It is a big (crushing) obstacle to investment in water conservation. C. When there is a source of water that is free of regulation (deep brackish water) there is a rush to put it under the aegis of the State Engineer lest it get developed. D. The River Compacts create complications and there is insufficient creativity in New Mexico about how to overcome those complications namely by encouraging cooperation between upstream and downstream users. E. There is a general reluctance to allow the water supply to increase lest more people move into New Mexico and economic activity expand. Understanding the institutional obstacles is one thing. Developing solutions and support for those solutions is quite another thing and not easy to accomplish in New Mexico. I will discuss this in my presentation which will be followed by presentations on some of the issues I have identified above. "

* Principal, S. Silber & Associates, 22B San Marcos E., Santa Fe, NM 87508 US, Phone: 505-473-7006, Email: ssilber1@juno.com