

DAILY TIMES EDITORIAL

Water plan holds promise

A proposal to create a water reserve to provide for long-term growth is a step in the right direction for New Mexico.

The plan is the brainchild of Think New Mexico. The idea is to purchase water rights along the state's waterways and keep the water within the rivers rather than diverting it for use.

By buying water now, it could be meted out later when needed without entering into a battle between agricultural and municipal needs.

State Engineer John D'Antonio would like to couple the reserve plan with another proposed in the Comprehensive State Water Plan that would allow for short-term leasing of water during times of drought.

New Mexicans should keep in mind that the plans would come with a cost. Buying up water and preventing its diversion for use will bring a browning effect. Areas now green and lush would dry up to some extent.

This browning effect can be seen across the West where growth has caused the more conservative use of water resources.

The past few very dry years have demonstrated that water is indeed a finite resource in New Mexico. Projections are the dry spell we are now experiencing will continue, possibly for a decade or more.

Sparse precipitation coupled with continued growth is a recipe for disaster if something isn't done.

Federal officials have made it clear that if New Mexico fails to address its water problems, the federal government will step in. It is doubtful that federal control of local water use will sit well with water users.

The plan to create a water reserve for long-term growth and a water bank for short-term shortages is a positive step toward proper water management in New Mexico.

While it won't make everybody happy, the alternative — to do nothing and continue with business as usual — is unacceptable.

In this column alone is The Daily Times' opinion expressed.

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