

**MINUTES
of the
SIXTH MEETING
of the
WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**November 17-18, 2025
State Capitol, Room 322
Santa Fe**

The sixth meeting of the Water and Natural Resources Committee was called to order by Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, chair, at 9:18 a.m. on Monday, November 17, 2025, in Room 322 of the State Capitol in Santa Fe.

Present

Sen. Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, Chair
Rep. Matthew McQueen, Vice Chair
Rep. Micaela Lara Cadena
Sen. Pete Campos (11/17)
Rep. Kathleen Cates
Sen. Candy Spence Ezzell
Rep. Miguel P. García
Rep. Jonathan A. Henry
Rep. Joseph Franklin Hernandez
Sen. Micaelita Debbie O'Malley
Rep. Kristina Ortez

Advisory Members

Rep. Eleanor Chávez
Rep. Martha Garcia
Sen. Linda M. López
Rep. Tara L. Lujan
Rep. Rod Montoya
Rep. Mark B. Murphy (11/18)
Sen. Mimi Stewart (11/17)
Sen. Anthony L. Thornton
Rep. Harlan Vincent (11/17)
Sen. Pat Woods

Absent

Sen. Joseph Cervantes
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Marian Matthews
Rep. Angelica Rubio
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana
Sen. Larry R. Scott
Rep. Elaine Sena Cortez
Sen. Jeff Steinborn
Sen. James G. Townsend
Rep. Martin R. Zamora

Rep. Gail Armstrong
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. Angel M. Charley
Rep. Jack Chatfield
Rep. Nicole Chavez
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. Joanne J. Ferrary
Rep. Charlotte Little
Rep. Stefani Lord
Sen. Antonio Maestas
Rep. Javier Martínez
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Rep. Tanya Mirabal Moya
Rep. Randall T. Pettigrew
Rep. Andrea Romero
Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero
Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez
Rep. Nathan P. Small
Sen. Peter Wirth

(Attendance dates are noted for members not present for the entire meeting.)

Staff

Sara Wiedmaier, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)

Ian Keller, Staff Attorney, LCS

Em Green, Staff Attorney, LCS

Gabriel Suazo, Intern, LCS

Angela Dakan, Staff, LCS

Minutes Approval

Because the committee will not meet again this year, the minutes for this meeting have not been officially approved by the committee.

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file and posted on the legislature's website.

References to Webcast

The time reference noted next to each agenda item in this document is cross-referenced to the recorded webcast of the committee meeting, which can be found at www.nmlegis.gov, under the "Webcast" tab. The presentations made and committee discussions for agenda items can be found on the recorded webcast for this meeting.

Monday, November 17

Welcome (9:18 a.m.)

Senator Stefanics welcomed everyone to the meeting and announced that committee members and staff would introduce themselves after the first panel.

Climate Change Impacts and Proposed Legislation (9:21 a.m.)

Ali Rye, secretary, Homeland Security and Emergency Management Department (DHSEM), discussed intensifying natural disaster events and how the DHSEM is responding through planning and federal coordination. Adrian Avila, principal fiscal analyst, New Mexico Senate Majority Office, and Senator Stewart discussed disaster recovery spending and proposed legislation to address climate change impacts in the state. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=1>.

Committee Introductions (10:25 a.m.)

Committee members and staff introduced themselves.

Community Solar Update and Public Regulation Commission (PRC) Session Priorities (10:30 a.m.)

Cholla Khoury, chief of staff, PRC, and John Kreienkamp, deputy director, Legal Division, PRC, provided updates on the Community Solar Program, highlighting multiple projects nearing energization, expanded outreach efforts and upcoming rulemaking to refine program design. Ms. Khoury also shared agency priorities for the upcoming session, such as dedicated funding to support regulation and oversight. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=2>.

Solar: Industry Status, Options and Access (11:15 a.m.)

Rebecca Puck Stair, director, Energy Conservation and Management Division, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD); Christian Casillas, Ph.D., executive director, Coalition of Sustainable Communities New Mexico; and Jim DesJardins, executive director, Renewable Energy Industries Association of New Mexico, gave updates on the solar energy market in the state. Ms. Stair reported market expansion despite challenges with permitting, interconnection and federal funding uncertainty. Mr. Casillas emphasized the need to expand access to low-income households and renters. Mr. DesJardins reported headwinds from federal incentive rollbacks, grid constraints and rising demand and encouraged coordinated action to ensure resilience and growth. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=3>.

Public Comment (12:32 p.m.)

A list of individuals who made public comment is available in the meeting file.

Community Energy Efficiency Development (CEED) Projects Update (1:22 p.m.)

Ms. Stair and Ann Simon, deputy director of environmental health and sustainability officer, City of Albuquerque, presented on the CEED program's goals to reduce energy consumption and costs and improve home energy efficiency, safety and comfort in energy-burdened areas. Ms. Stair noted the EMNRD's efforts to streamline implementation and expand access despite ordinance and wage-compliance delays. Ms. Simon reported that Albuquerque's CEED project is delivering home upgrades through its partnership with Prosperity Works. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

Senate Memorial 2 (2025) Report: Wildfire Study Group (2:18 p.m.)

Senator Woods; Ben Bajema, policy director, EMNRD; Elisabeth Johnson, associate general counsel and legislative liaison, Office of Superintendent of Insurance; and Riaz Mohammed, wildfire regulatory policy specialist, Xcel Energy, reported on the Wildfire Study Group recommendations, which included wildfire preparedness, response and recovery through interagency coordination, funding and community engagement. Laura McCarthy, state forester, Forestry Division, EMNRD, joined during the question-and-answer period to address a question about Forestry Division funding for the current fiscal year. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=5>.

Approval of Minutes (3:19 p.m.)

On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes of the October 29-30, 2025 meeting were approved without changes.

Strategic Water Reserve (SWR) Update and Office of the State Engineer (OSE) and Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) Session Priorities (3:20 p.m.)

Anjali Bean, senior policy advisor, Western Resource Advocates; Hannah Risely-White, director, ISC; and Elizabeth Anderson, state engineer, OSE, discussed the SWR's role in securing water rights for compact compliance, endangered species protection and aquifer recharge. They noted recent changes to the SWR program, including making the Strategic Water Reserve Fund nonreverting and considering ecological benefits in acquisitions. Ms. Anderson and Ms. White outlined future priorities, including modernizing data management tools and enforcement capabilities, investing in settlements and development of additional supply options, such as brackish water, and implementing the various elements of the 50-Year Water Action Plan. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=6>.

Aquifer Mapping Program and Water Data Act Updates (4:30 p.m.)

Stacy Timmons, associate director, Hydrogeology Programs, Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources (BGMR), New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology (NM Tech); Sean Connell, Ph.D., senior research scientist, BGMR, NM Tech; and Rachel Hobbs, water data program manager, BGMR, NM Tech, described the BGMR's aquifer mapping program and the state's Water Data Act as essential tools for understanding and managing water supplies in the state. They explained key findings, including declining ground water levels, slow aquifer recharge rates and data gaps in rural and agricultural areas. Ms. Hobbs added that a centralized water data platform for improved transparency and public access to water information is in development. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=7>.

Recess

The meeting recessed at 5:22 p.m.

Tuesday, November 18

Reconvene

The meeting reconvened at 8:41 a.m.

Water and Natural Resources — Workforce Development Wrap-Up (8:42 a.m.)

Sarita Nair, secretary, Workforce Solutions Department, discussed workforce development strategies for the energy, agriculture and natural resource management sectors, noting Community Benefit Fund projects and pre-apprenticeship programs. Xochitl Torres Small, executive director, Quivira Coalition, discussed the agriculture workforce's contributions to the state and the Quivira Coalition's investments in regenerative agriculture, noting an increase in the average age of farmers and the lack of technical skills and housing as workforce-building challenges. Eli Cuna, executive director, The Semilla Project, presented on The Semilla Project's Next Gen Workforce Hub, which aims to equip marginalized youth with skills, certifications and career pathways in climate justice, conservation and clean energy trades. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=8>.

Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) Cleanup, Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) Updates and Department of Environment (NMED) Session Priorities (9:47 a.m.)

James Kenney, secretary, NMED, and John S. Rhoderick, deputy secretary for administration, NMED, provided updates on cleanup activities at LANL and the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, highlighting ongoing ground water contamination issues, legacy waste remediation challenges and concerns about federal compliance with state regulatory requirements. Mr. Kenney also explained the Per- and Poly-Fluoroalkyl Substances Protection Act, which aims to phase out products with intentionally added PFAS and require transparency from manufacturers. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=9>.

PFAS: Health Impacts (11:15 a.m.)

Jean-Luc E. Cartron, M.D., Ph.D., research professor, Department of Biology, and associate, Museum of Southwest Biology, University of New Mexico (UNM), discussed PFAS contamination in the Holloman Lake ecosystem and the resulting wildlife impacts. He noted known PFAS-exposure pathways and health effects in birds and mammals. Wendy Johnson, M.D., M.P.H., family physician, and assistant professor, Department of Family and Community Medicine, UNM, reported that PFAS are linked to multiple health effects and urged the state to

set enforceable drinking water standards, require disclosure and mandate cleanup. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=10>.

Senate Memorial 19 (2025) Report: New Mexico Meat, Cheese and Produce in Schools (11:53 a.m.)

Jason New, director, Marketing and Development Division, New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA); Michael Chavez, director, Student Success and Wellness Bureau, Public Education Department (PED); Nayely Madrid, office manager, U.S.A. Beef Packing, LLC; and Alena Paisano, director, Approved Supplier Program, New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association, discussed the implementation of Senate Memorial 19 (2025), which directs the NMDA and the PED to develop a plan for New Mexico producers and processors to provide 50% of the beef, cheese, milk and produce served in public schools. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=11>.

Funding Cuts: Impacts on Energy and the Environment (1:17 p.m.)

Austin Davidson, fiscal analyst, Legislative Finance Committee, presented on recent and proposed federal funding cuts to state energy and environmental programs. Edward Martinez, Ph.D., deputy director, Operations and Development, New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute, New Mexico Highlands University, discussed recent federal cuts to programs supporting forest health, wildfire risk reduction and community engagement and asked for state support to shore up resilience of those programs. Luis A. Reyes, Jr., chief executive officer (CEO), Kit Carson Electric Cooperative, discussed impacts of cancellation of funding for the development of microgrids in the Taos area. Robert S. Balch, Ph.D., director, Petroleum Recovery Research Center, NM Tech, discussed the consequences of funding cuts on research, education and workforce development programs in energy, environment and technology at NM Tech, emphasizing the risks to New Mexico's leadership in critical fields like water, mining and renewable energy. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=12>.

Discussion of Proposed Legislation

Land Grant-Merced and Acequia Infrastructure Fund — .232274.4 (2:10 p.m.)

Representative Miguel P. García; Paula Garcia, executive director, New Mexico Acequia Association; and Arturo Archuleta, director, New Mexico Land Grant Council, discussed a

proposed bill that would create a permanent fund for land grant-merced and acequia communities, aiming to empower local governance and preserve cultural and environmental heritage. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=13>.

Green Amendment — .232673.1 (2:32 p.m.)

Senator Shannon D. Pinto; Representative Hernandez; Representative Lujan; and Maya van Rossum, founder, Green Amendments for the Generations, discussed a proposed constitutional amendment that would enshrine environmental rights and ensure environmental protections and accountability for future generations. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=14>.

Oil and Gas Reclamation Fund Changes — .232553.3 (2:40 p.m.)

Representative Murphy discussed a proposed bill that aims to strengthen the Oil and Gas Reclamation Fund's capacity, ensure adequate bonding and fee structures and address the growing backlog of abandoned wells and environmental liabilities. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=15>.

ISC Funding — .232521.1 (3:07 p.m.)

Senator Stefanics and Jason Casuga, P.E., CEO, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, presented a proposed appropriation to the ISC for Bosque management projects in the Middle Rio Grande Valley to address invasive species and increase resiliency to wildfires. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=11/17/2025&ItemNumber=16>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 3:29 p.m.