

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

**September 11-12, 2025
University of New Mexico-Taos
Bataan Hall
121 Civic Plaza Drive
Taos**

The fourth meeting of the Water and Natural Resources Committee was called to order by Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, chair, on Thursday, September 11, 2025, at 9:20 a.m. at the Bataan Hall of the University of New Mexico (UNM)-Taos in Taos.

Present

Sen. Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, Chair
Rep. Matthew McQueen, Vice Chair
Sen. Craig W. Brandt*
Rep. Micaela Lara Cadena
Sen. Pete Campos (9/11)
Sen. Joseph Cervantes
Sen. Angel M. Charley*
Sen. Micaelita Debbie O'Malley
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana
Sen. Larry R. Scott
Rep. Elaine Sena Cortez
Sen. Jeff Steinborn

Advisory Members

Rep. Martha Garcia
Rep. Tara L. Lujan (9/11)
Sen. Mimi Stewart
Sen. Anthony L. Thornton
Sen. Peter Wirth (9/11)

Absent

Rep. Kathleen Cates
Sen. Candy Spence Ezzell
Rep. Miguel P. García
Rep. Jonathan A. Henry
Rep. Joseph Franklin Hernandez
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Marian Matthews
Rep. Kristina Ortez
Rep. Angelica Rubio
Sen. James G. Townsend
Rep. Martin R. Zamora

Rep. Gail Armstrong
Rep. Jack Chatfield
Rep. Nicole Chavez
Rep. Eleanor Chávez
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. Joanne J. Ferrary
Rep. Charlotte Little
Sen. Linda M. López
Rep. Stefani Lord
Sen. Antonio Maestas
Rep. Javier Martínez
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Rep. Tanya Mirabal Moya
Rep. Rod Montoya
Rep. Mark B. Murphy

Rep. Randall T. Pettigrew
Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero
Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez
Rep. Nathan P. Small
Rep. Harlan Vincent
Sen. Pat Woods

Guest Legislators

Sen. Roberto "Bobby" J. Gonzales (9/11)
Rep. Susan K. Herrera
Sen. Cindy Nava
Rep. Andrea Romero
Sen. Benny Shendo, Jr. (9/12)
Sen. Linda M. Trujillo

*Appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives or the president pro tempore of the senate as a voting member for this meeting only.

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

Staff

Sara Wiedmaier, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Ian Keller, Staff Attorney, LCS
Gabriel Suazo, Intern, LCS
Angela Dakan, Staff, LCS

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.

Thursday, September 11

Welcome and Introductions (9:20 a.m.)

Senator Stefanics welcomed everyone, and committee members and staff introduced themselves.

Welcome and Local Updates (9:28 a.m.)

Mary Gutierrez, Ed.D., chancellor, UNM-Taos, welcomed the committee, discussed initiatives for building a locally trained workforce in natural resource management and requested renewed funding to keep training opportunities accessible to water operators and those in the clean energy workforce. Pascualito Maestas, mayor, Town of Taos, gave an update on water issues in Taos, including projects to implement the Taos Pueblo Water Rights Settlement Agreement and progress on the Taos Valley regional wastewater treatment and reclamation facility. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=9/11/2025&ItemNumber=1>.

Pollinator Protection Plan: Next Steps (9:51 a.m.)

Kamaile DeLong, state pest survey coordinator and apiary specialist, New Mexico Department of Agriculture, and chair, Pollinator Protection Plan Working Group; Olivia Carril, Ph.D., native bee expert; Melanie Kirby, agriculture extension educator and pollinator specialist, Land-Grant Programs, Institute of American Indian Arts, and queen bee breeder, Zia Queenbees Farm & Field Institute; and Eduardo Linares, owner and beekeeper, Enchanted Land Honey, discussed the status of pollinators in New Mexico. Ms. DeLong spoke about the difficulty of large-scale beekeeping in the state and consideration of a proposed state pollinator protection plan. Ms. Carril detailed the need for national distribution maps for species assessments and determination of extinction risks. Ms. Kirby discussed challenges for native pollinators, including unregulated importations, drought and poor nutrition. Mr. Linares relayed concerns from a commercial beekeeper's perspective. Recommendations from the panel included facilitating research on pollinator diversity and habitat and addressing the lack of clear and consistent laws and regulations related to beekeeping. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=9/11/2025&ItemNumber=2>.

Community Resilience and Wildfire Mitigation: Microgrids, Energy Storage and Public Safety Power Shutoffs (11:30 a.m.)

Rebecca "Puck" Stair, director, Energy Conservation and Management Division, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), presented ways that microgrids could help solve rural energy delivery issues, mitigate wildfire risks and lower overall energy costs. She also listed challenges, including high upfront costs and limited duration of backup power and technology infrastructure. Luis A. Reyes Jr., chief executive officer, Kit Carson Electric Cooperative, discussed developing technologies for collecting data, predicting weather events and modeling fire characteristics to enhance microgrid safety and energy resilience.

Lee Boughey, vice president, Member Experience, Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc. (Tri-State), detailed ways that Tri-State is optimizing its microgrid systems to make them more financially viable and resilient to wildfires. Wes Gray,

vice president, Operations and Engineering, Public Service Company of New Mexico, discussed the importance of storage in the transition to renewable energy and stated that pilot projects have demonstrated the viability of microgrids during power outages, but lack of interest has slowed development. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=9/11/2025&ItemNumber=3>.

Land Conservation Incentives Act (LCIA) (1:36 p.m.)

Jonathan Hayden, executive director, New Mexico Land Conservancy, and Esteban Muldavin, Ph.D., landowner, and division leader and ecology coordinator, Natural Heritage New Mexico, advised that the LCIA be updated to increase tax credits and eliminate caps on projects to allow more landowners in traditional communities to access conservation incentives. Cecilia Rosacker, farmer and executive director, Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust, discussed conservation issues in the middle Rio Grande and called for reform of the LCIA to protect farmlands, water rights and natural habitats. Ben Shelton, deputy secretary, EMNRD, gave an overview of the LCIA and suggested that the cap on valuation could be increased. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=9/11/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

Rio Grande Trail (RGT) Progress Update (2:33 p.m.)

Ben Bajema, chair, RGT Commission, and senior advisor to the secretary, EMNRD; Carl Colonius, program manager, New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division, Economic Development Department; and Casey Ish, director, Lands and Conservation, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, discussed the status of the RGT project, its partnerships and projected time line at the current designation rate and proposed legislation that could reduce liability risks in special districts and accelerate development of the trail. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=9/11/2025&ItemNumber=5>.

Approval of Minutes (3:07 p.m.)

On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes of the August 18-20, 2025 meeting were approved unanimously.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Land of Enchantment Legacy (LOE) Fund Updates (3:08 p.m.)

Judy Calman, policy director, Audubon Southwest, discussed successes of the LOE fund's first fiscal year, stating that the fund is exceeding its goals for conservation projects statewide. She also noted challenges, including demand outpacing available dollars and participating agencies' frustration with federal funding freezes. Gillian Joyce, government relations advocate, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, and executive director, Alianza Agricultura

de Taos, discussed the impacts of LOE funding for projects in Taos County, with a focus on the Healthy Soil program. She asserted that the funding is allowing for programmatic stability and consistency that is necessary to implement projects that will have generational impacts.

Robert Stokes, Ph.D., program support bureau chief, State Parks Division, EMNRD, gave an overview of projects and the state's role in administering the federal LWCF and developing the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, as mandated by the fund. Nick Streit, executive director, Friends of Rio Grande del Norte, expressed gratitude for funds like the LOE Fund, Outdoor Equity Fund and Trails+ Grant for their positive impacts on communities such as Taos. He noted the 3,000-acre Klauer property that was formerly privately owned and is now in the public trust under federal Bureau of Land Management control thanks to the LWCF and stated the importance of public lands to the state's economy and culture. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=9/11/2025&ItemNumber=6>.

Department of Game and Fish (DGF) Reform Implementation (4:16 p.m.)

Michael B. Sloane, director, DGF, provided updates on DGF reform, including the department's name change to the Department of Wildlife; a time line for fee adjustments; the extension of protections to all species of wildlife and formal definition of "Species of Greatest Conservation Need" (SGCN); and changes to the State Game Commission nominating process. Mr. Sloane also revealed the new logo for the Department of Wildlife, reported the hiring of eight biologists to build capacity for SGCNs and noted current work on habitat projects and the monitoring of migratory songbirds. He said that the fee increases are expected to generate an additional \$9-10 million in revenue for the department.

Jon Hayes, executive director, Audubon Southwest, discussed the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) revision process, the number of SGCNs in the 2017 SWAP compared to 2025 and current SGCN projects, including the tagging and monitoring of endangered grassland birds. Jesse Deubel, executive director, New Mexico Wildlife Federation, emphasized the bipartisan support for adding requirements for the removal of State Game Commission members as proposed by Senate Bill 5 (2025) but line-item vetoed by the governor. He stated that the commission has not been at full membership in three of the last five years and expressed the importance of a fair removal process that does not leave that power with only one person. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=9/11/2025&ItemNumber=7>.

Public Comment (4:47 p.m.)

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

Recess

The meeting recessed at 5:21 p.m.

Friday, September 12

Reconvene

The meeting reconvened at 8:36 a.m.

Acequia Capacity Building and Technical Assistance (8:38 a.m.)

Paula Garcia, executive director, New Mexico Acequia Association (NMAA), presented on the accelerated growth in the NMAA's work in disaster recovery, stating that state programs need to be in place in conjunction with the NMAA's administrative work for recovery projects to be effective. Jonathan Martinez, chief, Acequia Bureau, Interstate Stream Commission (ISC), discussed the Acequia and Community Ditch Infrastructure Fund, which provides annual funds for planning, design or construction of irrigation works for purposes such as restoration, disaster recovery, irrigation efficiency and hazard mitigation. Manuel Luna, small local public body coordinator, Office of the State Auditor (OSA), discussed how the OSA provides support, training and technical assistance to help acequias and small entities meet audit and compliance obligations and ensure access to critical funds for system upgrades, conservation projects and long-term sustainability. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=9/11/2025&ItemNumber=8>.

Water Security Planning Act (WSPA) (9:17 a.m.)

Hannah Riseley-White, director, ISC, presented on the implementation of the WSPA through regional and state water-planning campaigns, including development of proposed rules, templates for public engagement, project evaluation tools and a time line through 2030.

Mike Hamman, P.E., former state engineer, and member, Executive Committee, New Mexico Water Ambassadors (NMWA), explained that the NMWA was formed to advance the Water Policy and Infrastructure Task Force recommendations for a comprehensive approach to managing water scarcity in New Mexico. He highlighted recent legislative accomplishments and listed future priorities that focus on local capacity building and demand management, data integration and planning tools, policy modernization and support for sustainable agriculture.

Daryl Vigil, Water and Tribes Initiative, and member, NMWA, expressed excitement about the advancement of state-tribal collaborative problem solving for water scarcity issues. He highlighted a recent, "first-of-its-kind" sovereign-to-sovereign cooperative mechanism for managing water resources in the Colorado River Basin that allows the ISC to lease water from the Jicarilla Apache Nation to benefit threatened species and increase water security in New Mexico.

Vidal Gonzales, director of policy and planning, NMAA, discussed the major role that acequias play in water governance and gave legislative and budget recommendations to enable ISC staff to effectively engage with and contribute to capacity building in rural communities.

Norm Gaume, P.E. (retired), president, New Mexico Water Advocates, discussed the urgency of water management regulations and his belief that if action is not taken, Elephant Butte Reservoir could be empty by the end of the current irrigation season. He also expressed worries about Rio Grande Compact violations triggering new litigation. The presentation materials can be found here:

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

Strategic Water Reserve Funding (rescheduled)

Due to time constraints of the host facility, this agenda topic was rescheduled for a future meeting of the committee.

Texas v. New Mexico: Supreme Court Filing Update (11:01 a.m.)

Elizabeth Anderson, state engineer, Office of the State Engineer (OSE); Nat Chakeres, general counsel, OSE; Ms. Riseley-White; and James Grayson, chief deputy attorney general, State Department of Justice, discussed elements of the settlement agreement in the *Texas v. New Mexico* lawsuit, including a background on legal cases, benefits to New Mexico and implementation requirements. They noted that while there are costs involved in the settlement, those costs will go toward effecting sustainability measures that are needed in the region and that New Mexico is in a better position than if the state had gone to trial. The presentation materials can be found here:

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

Adjournment and Tour

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 12:01 p.m. Members of the committee and staff received a tour of the Taos Land Trust and Fred Baca Park Wetlands. Members engaged in a conversation regarding land trust projects, wetlands conservation and coexistence with beavers.