Environmental Defense Fund

Advancing Our Groundwater Security

Consistently ranked among the top five driest states in the U.S as measured by precipitation, New Mexico has long relied heavily on groundwater as the foundation for our communities, livelihoods, and economy. Ninety-two percent of New Mexico's community water systems rely completely on groundwater as their water source, and groundwater comprises over half of the water used for agriculture in the state. And as our surface waters become increasingly constrained due to climate change and overuse, our dependence on groundwater is only likely to deepen. New Mexicans' water security is at risk, and communities and farmers across New Mexico - cities like Clovis and Portales and agricultural communities like those around the middle and lower Rio Grande - are already facing the severe impacts of groundwater scarcity.

There are notable positive examples of groundwater management in the state, including efforts led by the Pecos Valley Artesian Conservation District and the Ogallala Land and Water Conservancy. However, despite groundwater's critical importance to New Mexico, we do not have sufficient capacity or frameworks in place to effectively manage this precious resource to sustain current and future generations and keep our ecosystems and economy thriving. Needed improvements include mechanisms and additional funding to:

- Invest in expanding groundwater science and data.
- Support effective groundwater management at the state, regional, and local levels
- Develop and implement effective, long-term groundwater conservation approaches.

Let's Talk Groundwater Management

Effective groundwater management refers to a set of activities and tools designed to proactively balance supply and demand in a way that sustains the life of groundwater supplies, ensuring that the people, businesses, and natural environments that rely on groundwater will thrive now and for generations to come.
Effective groundwater management requires:

- Information to inform our understanding of aquifer systems. For example, groundwater data related to water levels, aquifer characterizations, and groundwater quality
- Locally tailored management frameworks with clear guardrails and targets to protect groundwater resources over the long term
- Responsible management entities with authority, capacity, and funding to manage, and
- Transparent, community-involved decision making

Effective groundwater management requires extensive local engagement and participation supported by well-resourced agencies, robust monitoring, and consistent funding streams to support ongoing local, regional, and statewide protocols to protect and secure groundwater resources.

New Mexico has a foundation of knowledge and experience to build on. There is the traditional knowledge and experiences of pueblo and tribal communities, as well as the irrigation knowledge embedded in acequia communities and generations of New Mexican farm and ranch families. Ongoing efforts include regional planning, piloted groundwater conservation projects, and significant state efforts to build and lead water-related initiatives through research, policies, and fund development. It is a solid start, but more is needed.

Let's Talk Solutions and Actions

Examples of groundwater management solutions and tools include:

- Groundwater data and information. *We cannot manage what we do not measure.* Groundwater management relies on valid, reliable, timely, groundwater data. New Mexico's current institutional resources devoted to understanding the state's groundwater, including its geology, quantity, quality, uses and impacts, are not sufficient to meet the groundwater challenges many New Mexico communities are beginning to face. In many areas of the state we do not know how much groundwater is available or how long it will last at current pumping rates. Without intervention key aquifers may reach the end of their useful life in the next few years. The New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources at NM Tech is leading the effort to understand New Mexico's aquifers so that we can soundly manage our groundwater in the future. Past appropriations from the legislature and governor have boosted these critical efforts but we need ongoing, multi-year investment in the years ahead to ensure this work is sustained and to build the information base needed to ensure New Mexico's progress toward water security.
- Agricultural groundwater conservation tools. Agricultural communities are often among the first to feel the impacts of groundwater scarcity and they have a key role to play in addressing this challenge. Many farmers and ranchers are already seeking practices to help conserve groundwater, thereby protecting their communities' drinking water, while also keeping their livelihoods strong. Such practices include switching to lower water-use crops or dryland farming to reduce water demands, investing in soil health improvement, and protecting fallowed land with cover crops.
- Managed aquifer recharge and aquifer storage and recovery. Proactive groundwater recharge and storage have great potential to support groundwater security by recharging water to aquifers when it is available and storing it for later needs in times of scarcity. Comprehensive best practices are needed to ensure such projects are tailored to local hydrologic and geologic contexts.

Let's Talk Short Run Specifics

Building on the positive progress and initial investments made in the 2025 Legislative Session, the New Mexico State Legislature has both opportunity and obligation to enact policies and provide sustained funding for strategies designed to implement and strengthen New Mexico's groundwater management in the long-term. Specifically, during the 2026 Legislative Session, and beyond we urge legislators to:

Fully Fund Groundwater Science

- Allocate additional funding to the New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources to:
    - To install and maintain a statewide network of exploratory/monitoring wells and to conduct geophysical surveys for improved aquifer characterization.
    - Increase recurring budgets to improve and sustain ongoing monitoring activities and update aquifer characterization state-wide, consistent with the Governor's 50-Year Water Action Plan.

Invest in Groundwater Conservation Efforts

- Support and invest in agricultural communities' groundwater conservation efforts, including facilitation of stakeholder input and scientific evaluation and monitoring.
- Support and invest in regional water management systems to ensure they have the resources and capacity they need to advance their groundwater security efforts.

We look forward to working with the Legislature to advance legislative actions that will help ensure water security for New Mexico communities, farmers, businesses, and ecosystems facing critical levels of groundwater decline today, as well as future generations of New Mexicans to come.

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