

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

August 31-September 1, 2026

**Joseph A. Fidel Center
New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology
801 Leroy Place
Socorro**

The third meeting of the Water and Natural Resources Committee was called to order by Representative Kristina Ortiz, chair, on Monday, August 31, 2026, at 9:35 a.m. at the Joseph A. Fidel Center at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology (NMT) in Socorro.

Present

Rep. Kristina Ortiz, Chair
Sen. Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, Vice Chair
Rep. Micaela Lara Cadena
Sen. Pete Campos (8/31)
Rep. Kathleen Cates
Sen. Candy Spence Ezzell
Rep. Miguel P. García (8/31)
Rep. Jonathan A. Henry
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson (8/31)
Rep. Marian Matthews
Rep. Matthew McQueen (8/31)
Sen. Micaelita Debbie O'Malley
Rep. Randall T. Pettigrew
Rep. Angelica Rubio
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana
Sen. Larry R. Scott
Sen. James G. Townsend

Advisory Members

Sen. Craig W. Brandt (9/1)
Sen. Angel M. Charley (8/31)
Rep. Jack Chatfield
Rep. Eleanor Chávez
Rep. Charlotte Little (8/31)
Sen. Linda M. López

Absent

Sen. Joseph Cervantes
Rep. Joseph Franklin Hernandez
Rep. Elaine Sena Cortez
Sen. Jeff Steinborn

Rep. Gail Armstrong
Rep. Nicole Chavez
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. Martha Garcia
Rep. Stefani Lord
Sen. Antonio Maestas

Rep. Tara L. Lujan
Rep. Mark B. Murphy (9/1)
Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez (8/31)
Sen. Anthony L. Thornton (8/31)
Sen. Peter Wirth (8/31)
Sen. Pat Woods (9/1)

Rep. Javier Martínez
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Rep. Tanya Mirabal Moya
Rep. Rod Montoya
Rep. Andrea Romero
Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero
Rep. Nathan P. Small
Sen. Mimi Stewart
Rep. Harlan Vincent
Rep. Martin R. Zamora

Guest Legislator

Rep. Jenifer Jones (9/1)

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

Staff

Sara Wiedmaier, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Em Green, Staff Attorney, LCS
Angela Dakan, Staff, LCS
Alyssa Reyes, Intern, 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.

Monday, August 31

Welcome and Introductions (9:35 a.m.)

Representative Orteza welcomed everyone, and committee members introduced themselves.

Welcome and Local Updates (9:44 a.m.)

Ravi Bhasker, mayor, City of Socorro, discussed local priorities and challenges, including aging water infrastructure, water supply and ground water contamination issues, flood control projects, housing shortages and funding needs for water system improvements. He noted that NMT remains a major economic driver for the region. Mike Timmons, director and state geologist, Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources, NMT, highlighted the university's science-, technology-, mathematics- and engineering-focused mission, research programs, statewide economic impact, workforce development contributions and national recognition. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/31/2026&ItemNumber=1>.

Unit Fund Updates, Water Infrastructure Funding and Responding to Water Emergencies (10:04 a.m.)

Jesse Shapiro, manager, Arizona Water Settlements Act, Interstate Stream Commission (ISC), gave an update on the Unit Fund, which currently holds approximately \$134 million for water-related projects in southwestern New Mexico, and highlighted improvements to the funding application process. Priscilla Lucero, executive director, Southwest New Mexico Council of Governments; Grant County Regional Water Project (GCRWP), discussed the GCRWP, a regional partnership to improve water reliability and infrastructure capacity in Grant County while supporting housing and economic development. Marquita Russel, chief executive officer (CEO), New Mexico Finance Authority (NMFA), provided an update on the NMFA's water funding programs, highlighting low-interest financing, technical assistance, regionalization support and recent changes to expand and accelerate water and wastewater infrastructure projects. Joe Martinez, chief, Drinking Water Bureau, Water Protection Division, Department of Environment (NMED), discussed challenges faced by small and rural water systems, including aging infrastructure, drought and limited local capacity, and emphasized the need to proactively prevent water system emergencies through improved planning, technical assistance and infrastructure maintenance. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/31/2026&ItemNumber=2>.

Texas v. New Mexico Settlement and Rio Grande Compact Status; Regional Water Management, Metering and Water Law Enforcement (11:21 a.m.)

Elizabeth "Liz" Anderson, state engineer, Office of the State Engineer (OSE), and Hannah Riseley-White, director, ISC, provided an update on New Mexico's hydrologic conditions, including declining snowpack, stream flows and reservoir and aquifer levels, and discussed efforts to prepare for long-term reductions in water availability. They discussed the implementation of the *Texas v. New Mexico* settlement, Rio Grande Compact obligations and initiatives related to conservation, ground water management, aquifer recharge, bosque

restoration and regional water planning. Greg Daviet, board vice president, Elephant Butte Irrigation District, and Jason Casuga, chief engineer and CEO, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD), discussed drought impacts and water management challenges in the lower and middle Rio Grande, emphasizing the importance of interagency partnerships, water infrastructure improvements, conservation measures, public engagement and long-term strategies to improve water supply reliability, river performance and compact compliance. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/31/2026&ItemNumber=3>.

Public Comment (1:41 p.m.)

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

Data Centers, Part 2: Water Use (1:53 p.m.)

Nat Chakeres, general counsel, OSE, discussed water use by data centers and provided an update on Project Jupiter. He explained that the project's water use is supplied through an existing water right, reviewed the approval and legal challenge of an emergency replacement well and emphasized that water rights are administered based on legal priority, not type of use. Margaret Cook, Ph.D., vice president, Water and Community Resilience, Houston Advanced Research Center, discussed the potential water and energy demands of future data centers and emphasized the need for transparency, efficient technologies and sustainable water management to support future development. Tyler Diers, public policy manager, Meta, and Jeff Shaw, water manager, Site Development, Meta, discussed water management at Meta's Los Lunas data center, highlighting investments in water conservation, infrastructure improvements and watershed restoration projects in New Mexico. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/31/2026&ItemNumber=4>.

Middle Rio Grande: Bosque Management, Drought Impacts, Water Delivery and Conservation Strategies (3:54 p.m.)

Sharon Wirth, bureau chief, Middle Rio Grande Basin, ISC, discussed how drought, sediment buildup and vegetation growth are reducing the Rio Grande's ability to convey water and highlighted ongoing state and federal efforts to improve river conveyance, reduce flood risk and address long-term channel management. Casey Ish, director, Lands and Conservation, MRGCD, and Will Kolbensschlag, district manager, Socorro Soil and Water Conservation District, discussed bosque restoration, invasive species removal, water conservation efforts and irrigation efficiency projects for water savings, wildfire risk reduction, ecosystem resilience and compact compliance, as well as the need for continued funding. Amy Erickson, conservation specialist, Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (RGALT), discussed the use of conservation

easements to protect agricultural lands, wildlife habitat and water rights and highlighted partnerships supporting long-term stewardship of protected lands along the Rio Grande corridor. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/31/2026&ItemNumber=5>.

Conservation Easements (4:41 p.m.)

Jonathan Hayden, executive director, New Mexico Land Conservancy, and Cecilia Rosacker, executive director, RGALT, discussed proposed updates to the Land Conservation Incentives Act to strengthen conservation easement incentives and improve protection of agricultural lands, wildlife habitat and water rights amid increasing drought, development pressures and rising land values. Ron Moya, farmer and conservation easement landowner, shared his experience with placing his farm under a conservation easement and emphasized the importance of effective incentives and tools to help preserve working farmlands and water rights for future generations. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/31/2026&ItemNumber=6>.

Recess and Conservation Easement Farm Tour

The meeting recessed at 5:10 p.m. for a tour of La Joya Valley Farms in La Joya.

Tuesday, September 1

Reconvene

The meeting reconvened at 9:25 a.m.

Water Data Act and Aquifer Mapping Program Updates (9:25 a.m.)

Stacy Timmons, associate director, Hydrogeology Programs, Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources, NMT; Sean Connell, Ph.D., senior research scientist, Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources, NMT; and Rachel Hobbs, Water Data Program manager, Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources, NMT, provided updates on aquifer mapping, ground water monitoring, geophysical surveying and Water Data Act implementation, highlighting efforts to improve understanding of ground water resources, expand public access to water data and support long-term water planning and management. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/31/2026&ItemNumber=7>.

Geothermal: Exploration, Development and Funding (11:04 a.m.)

Rebecca "Puck" Stair, director, Energy Conservation and Management Division, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, provided an update on geothermal development efforts, including funding, workforce training, outreach and permitting, and discussed challenges related to exploration, infrastructure and regulatory capacity. Shari Kelley, lead research scientist, Geothermal Program, Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources, NMT, provided an overview of New Mexico's geothermal potential, emerging technologies and NMT's research and workforce development efforts, emphasizing the need for additional geophysical exploration to advance development. Jackson Grimes, director of global engagement, InnerSpace Action, discussed policy opportunities to expand geothermal energy development and highlighted its potential to support the electric grid, direct-use applications, economic development and workforce transition efforts. Erik Olson, senior associate, Policy and Regulatory Affairs, Zanskar, discussed Zanskar's geothermal exploration and development efforts, including improvements to the Lightning Dock power plant in Hidalgo County, and emphasized the importance of efficient permitting, community engagement and continued investment to advance geothermal development in the state. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/31/2026&ItemNumber=8>.

Approval of Minutes (12:43 p.m.)

On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes of the May 21, 2026 and July 13-14, 2026 meetings were approved without changes.

Public Comment (12:44 p.m.)

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

Strategic Water Supply (SWS): Brackish Development Projects and Grant Funding (1:17 p.m.)

Jonas Armstrong, director, Water Protection Division, NMED, provided an update on the SWS program, highlighting investments in brackish water exploration, desalination and agricultural-use projects, strong demand for funding and efforts to expand public-private partnerships and future funding. Jennifer Raney, deputy director, Petroleum Recovery Research Center, NMT, discussed efforts to develop desalination and water treatment technologies, expand water supplies, train the water workforce and serve rural communities. Adam Ringia, deputy chief of operations, Pueblo of Laguna, discussed an SWS project to evaluate brackish ground water resources near the Pueblo of Laguna as a potential new water source for nearby communities to improve water reliability, support economic development and reduce reliance on Rio Grande supplies. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/31/2026&ItemNumber=9>.

Water Filtration Technology and Mineral Recovery and Valorization Potential (2:02 p.m.)

Jianjia Yu, Ph.D., research scientist and assistant professor of chemical engineering, NMT, presented research on advanced-membrane technologies to treat produced and brackish water, including portable, energy-efficient systems capable of reducing treatment costs by using waste heat, geothermal energy and solar power. He also highlighted research on improving water recovery rates and extracting valuable minerals such as lithium from desalination byproducts. John Byrom, chief commercial officer, Process Equipment and Service Company (PESCO), described partnering with NMT to commercialize advanced membrane technology and highlighted projects aimed at expanding water supplies and evaluating the performance of produced water treatment systems. Steve Grey, owner and president, Grey LLC, discussed a partnership among NMT, PESCO, Navajo Technical University and the Navajo Nation to improve water security and expand access to clean water across the Navajo Nation. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/31/2026&ItemNumber=10>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 3:11 p.m.