



*Bringing people together across sectors,  
generations, and geographies to co-create  
a water-secure future for New Mexico*

**Date:** August 12, 2025

**To:** LFC Chairman Nathan Small and Vice-chair George Muñoz  
WNRC Chair Elizabeth Stefanics and Vice-chair Matthew McQueen

**RE:** Status of the New Mexico Water Ambassadors and Their Engagement in the Interim Committee Process

Dear Interim Committee Leadership,

We write to share the status and future mission of the New Mexico Water Ambassadors (WAs), a diverse and representative group of water experts who are dedicated to advancing the recommendations of the Water Policy and Infrastructure Task Force, which issued its findings and recommendations to the Legislature in December 2022.

Since then, numerous members of the WAs have remained actively engaged with the legislative process, championing the 17 recommendations and associated action items, many of which the NM Legislature has significantly advanced over the last three legislative sessions. We are deeply grateful for the Legislature's continued commitment—reflected in the passage of critical water legislation and investments—to securing New Mexico's water future in the face of persistent drought, rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and increasing water scarcity.

Continuing surface water shortages are directly impacting watersheds, downstream communities, and agricultural producers who rely on snowmelt runoff to sustain both ecosystems and local economies. The ongoing 25-year drought has destabilized even the most resilient systems in our state and now threatens New Mexico's ability to meet interstate compact obligations across seven river basins. As surface water supplies shrink and groundwater recharge diminishes, growing pressure is placed on New Mexico's poorly defined aquifers—vital resources that have sustained rural communities and agriculture for generations. These compounding threats are before us now, and the Water Ambassadors are stepping forward to support collaborative, statewide solutions.

#### *Who We Are*

The Water Ambassadors represent a broad coalition of proactive water managers, tribal and community leaders, advocates, scientists, and technical experts who have decades of experience addressing water issues in their regions and navigating state and federal systems to advance New Mexico's water security. We firmly believe that working together to bolster statewide support for critical projects and policies while building community-based

engagement is critical for the sustainable use and protection of New Mexico’s declining water resources.

**Our mission is clear: to bring people together across sectors, generations, and geographies to co-create a water secure future for New Mexico.**

### *Why We Were Successful and Why We are Stepping Forward*

The New Mexico Water Policy and Infrastructure Task Force was convened by the Governor chaired by the State Engineer, and guided by an Executive Committee of the Deputy Secretary of the NMED, the Director of the ISC, and the Executive Director of the NMFA. With limited public resources, we were fortunate to receive philanthropic support from the Thornburg Foundation, which also engaged the unique talents of the Utton Transboundary Resources Center to help us complete the December 2022 report—a comprehensive set of recommendations delivered in just six months.

We also greatly benefited from the guidance of the 11 legislators who served as our liaisons. Their insights helped us raise awareness about the alarming projections in the 50-Year Leap Ahead Analysis, prioritize among the 17 key recommendations, and shape effective messaging and engagement strategies for both the Interim Committees and the Governor’s Office. Their advice on how best to navigate the legislative process and engage the full Legislature was instrumental—without it, our success would have been significantly limited.

**Flagship accomplishments** from the 2023 and 2025 legislative sessions that are making a tangible difference, especially in rural, underserved communities across the state, include:

- **Passage of the Regional Water System Resiliency Act**
- **Enactment of the Water Security Planning Act**
- **Significant funding increases** for:
  - Natural resources agency budgets
  - Water infrastructure projects, especially in rural and underserved communities struggling to deliver clean, reliable water
- **Implementation of the Water Data Act** and new resources to assess the state’s aquifers
- **Robust legislative support** for resolving and implementing the *Texas v. New Mexico* settlement (pending August 2025), essential for compliance with the Rio Grande Compact and protecting middle and lower Rio Grande communities

### *Our Strategic Priorities Moving Forward*

Water Ambassadors are stepping into a bold new role—not by executive order, but by necessity, by responsibility, and by the moral urgency of this moment. We will champion a unified set of persistent themes that guide our legislative advocacy, partnerships, and regional planning efforts. These strategic priorities reflect areas of alignment across multiple

statewide planning frameworks. They are **not presented in any order of priority**, but should be considered of **equal importance** in shaping a comprehensive and collaborative approach to water security in New Mexico.

- Tools for Managing Water Scarcity
- Water for Nature
- Mobilizing Public Infrastructure Funds
- Groundwater Sustainability and Protection (Policies & Management)
- Regional Budgeting & Demand Management
- Data Integration & Planning Tools
- Rural & Tribal Equity in Water Planning
- Policy Modernization & Legal Reform
- Support for Sustainable Agriculture to Enhance Local Food Security
- Strengthening State Agency Capacity to Ensure Water Security (OSE, ISC, NMED, NMDA, EMNRD)
- Local Capacity Development (Tribal, Rural, and Regional)

### *The Water Ambassadors' Next Steps*

We are answering the call for water resilience—not with a new task force, but by accelerating our ongoing efforts. We know the stakes, the systems, the key people in the regions, and the solutions. And we are organizing from the ground up – across communities, landscapes, and watersheds – to put the most urgent water strategies into action.

As the state begins to implement the Water Security Planning Act, the Water Ambassadors are poised to support communities across the state in close coordination with the Interstate Stream Commission, local and Tribal governments, and stakeholders to accelerate regional readiness and ensure lasting community engagement. To accomplish this objective, we plan to organize and facilitate regional forums in each of the nine planning regions to launch community-led pre-planning efforts. These grassroots conversations—led by trusted local Water Ambassadors—will build trust, foster early engagement, and cultivate local leadership. They will ensure that each region enters the ISC-led formal planning process with active councils, clearly defined priorities, and a shared understanding of regional needs and opportunities.

Without early-stage organizing, New Mexico risks undercutting the Legislature's investment in the Water Security Planning Act. The ISC's formal planning process is expected to take two to three years to fully unfold. In that time, the absence of community-led engagement could result in uneven readiness, lower participation, and missed opportunities. Aligning agency-led and community-led efforts from the outset will safeguard the Legislature's investment and accelerate measurable progress toward regional water security.

This approach will ensure that every region—particularly those historically under-resourced—enters the ISC-led planning process ready to contribute and lead. Coordinating closely with the ISC’s forthcoming Regional Planning Advisory Committee will keep grassroots and agency-led efforts aligned, moving in tandem toward a secure water future for all New Mexicans.

*Our Request*

We respectfully request the opportunity for our executive team to present at an upcoming interim committee meeting this summer or fall. We would value the chance to brief your committees on the Water Ambassadors’ mission, share progress made since the conclusion of the Water Policy and Infrastructure Task Force (WPITF), and outline our plans to support regional water planning across New Mexico.

As original members of the WPITF and now as Water Ambassadors, it has been an honor to work alongside Interim Committee leadership in advancing strategic water solutions for the state. In this time of escalating resource pressures and national uncertainty, New Mexico’s leadership matters more than ever. We remain ready to serve—bringing continuity, strong statewide partnerships, and trusted expertise to the work ahead. We look forward to continuing this collaboration with urgency, focus, and shared resolve.

Sincerely,

Ladona Clayton, Executive Director  
Ogallala Land & Water Conservancy

Mike Hamman  
Former State Engineer

Priscilla Lucero, Executive Director  
Southwest New Mexico Council of Governments

Daryl Vigil  
Water & Tribes Initiative

Patrick McCarthy, Senior Water Policy Officer  
Thornburg Foundation