



NEW MEXICO LEGISLATURE

**WATER AND
NATURAL RESOURCES
COMMITTEE**

2025 INTERIM FINAL REPORT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SERVICE
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INTERIM SUMMARY

Water and Natural Resources Committee 2025 Interim Summary

The Water and Natural Resources Committee (WNRC) was created by the New Mexico Legislative Council on April 28, 2025 and held six in-person meetings in Santa Fe, Las Vegas, Las Cruces, Taos and Artesia. At the first meeting, held in June in Santa Fe, members received an overview of WNRC-related legislation and budget updates from the 2025 session and discussed the proposed 2025 interim work plan and meeting schedule.

In July, the WNRC convened in Las Vegas, where much of the discussion was dedicated to fire recovery and forest management, including post-fire flood issues and impacts to drinking water systems, reforestation programs, wildfire planning, community preparedness and insurance access. The committee also heard presentations on acequia disaster recovery efforts and statewide dam projects and a report on the San Juan Generating Station and mine remediation study.

At the August meeting in Las Cruces, the committee heard reports on local food access and the impact of federal funding cuts; workforce development programs in agriculture and water technology; in-state meat processing; drought impacts; the economic impact of state parks; and electrification projects in the City of Las Cruces. Topics also included lower Rio Grande water management, the fifty-year water action plan, brackish water development and the Surface Water Permitting Program. The committee toured the Kay Bailey Hutchison Desalination and Blue Brine plants in El Paso, Texas.

In Taos, at its September meeting, the committee addressed local clean energy workforce development programs, pollinator protections and wildfire mitigation and energy resiliency efforts. Members heard presentations on land conservation incentives, Rio Grande Trail progress, Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund updates, Department of Game and Fish reform, acequia capacity building, water security planning and the *Texas v. New Mexico* settlement agreement. The committee toured the Taos Land Trust and Fred Baca Park Wetlands.

In October, the committee met in Artesia and focused on topics such as air quality around oil and gas operations, oil and gas production and royalty rates, workforce development, reuse of treated produced water and enforcement and reform of the Oil and Gas Act. The committee also heard presentations on rainfall enhancement, cleanup of neglected ground water spills, water and energy use by data centers and the growing fusion energy industry in New Mexico. Members toured HF Sinclair Corporation operations in Artesia.

In November, at the committee's final meeting in Santa Fe, topics covered included climate change impacts, community solar and energy efficiency projects, solar industry status and the Wildfire Study Group report. Committee members heard updates on the strategic water reserve, aquifer mapping program and Water Data Act; workforce development in agriculture and energy; Los Alamos National Laboratory cleanup; per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances contamination and health impacts; sourcing local foods for schools; and the effects of federal funding cuts to state energy and environmental programs. Members also heard from water- and natural resource-related agencies on priorities for the upcoming legislative session. The committee reviewed proposed legislation but did not consider any legislation for endorsement for the 2026 legislative session.

WORK PLAN AND MEETING SCHEDULE

**2025 APPROVED
WORK PLAN AND MEETING SCHEDULE
for the
WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Members

Sen. Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, Chair
Rep. Matthew McQueen, Vice Chair
Rep. Micaela Lara Cadena
Sen. Pete Campos
Rep. Kathleen Cates
Sen. Joseph Cervantes
Sen. Candy Spence Ezzell
Rep. Miguel P. García
Rep. Jonathan A. Henry
Rep. Joseph Franklin Hernandez
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson

Rep. Marian Matthews
Sen. Micaelita Debbie O'Malley
Rep. Kristina Ortez
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

Advisory Members

Rep. Gail Armstrong
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. Angel M. Charley
Rep. Jack Chatfield
Rep. Nicole Chavez
Rep. Eleanor Chávez
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. Joanne J. Ferrary
Rep. Martha Garcia
Rep. Charlotte Little
Sen. Linda M. López
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Tara L. Lujan
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
Sen. Mimi Stewart
Sen. Anthony L. Thornton
Rep. Harlan Vincent
Sen. Peter Wirth
Sen. Pat Woods

Work Plan

The Water and Natural Resources Committee was created by the New Mexico Legislative Council on April 28, 2025. The committee will focus on the following topics, as scheduling permits:

A. topics concerning **water**, including:

1. the Surface Water Quality Permitting Program (Senate Bill (SB) 21) (2025) and the impact of industry on water quality;
2. Water Data Act and Aquifer Mapping Program: updates, integration, access and gaps in data and funding;

3. the status of the Strategic Water Reserve and fund changes (SB 37) (2025);
4. a Water Security Planning Act report and regional water planning, including:
 - a. implementation, rulemaking status and funding needs;
 - b. water security in times of water scarcity and drought and Office of the State Engineer well permitting in water-scarce regions;
 - c. sequencing regional planning efforts and infrastructure needs; and
 - d. updates from the Water Security Tribal Advisory Council;
5. implementation of the Strategic Water Supply Program pursuant to House Bill (HB) 137 (2025) and desalination as a tool for augmentation of state water resources;
6. an update on the governor's 50-year water plan;
7. water rights administration: metering, monitoring, enforcement, shortage-sharing and solutions to prevent water theft, modernize water management and support key industries;
8. increasing water use penalties, as proposed by SB 210 (2025) and HB 348 (2025);
9. water supply strategies and conservation alternatives, including an update on the Roosevelt Soil and Water Conservation District Rainfall Enhancement Program;
10. acequia infrastructure challenges and opportunities, including:
 - a. a report on the outcome of HB 330 (2025), which would have enacted the Land Grant-Merced and Acequia Infrastructure Act;
 - b. an update on the Acequia and Community Ditch Infrastructure Fund;
 - c. the proposed creation of the Acequia Bureau;
 - d. Acequia and Community Ditch Education Program changes; and
 - e. disaster recovery programs, acequia restoration and funding needs;
11. Indian water rights settlements updates;
12. *Texas v. New Mexico* settlement updates, lower Rio Grande water challenges and Rio Grande Compact status;

13. New Mexico Unit Fund: distributions, proposed uses and funding;
14. Colorado River basin and Colorado River Compact updates;
15. increased water demand from data centers and other economic development projects; and
16. per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances contamination of aquifers and water sources;

B. topics concerning **energy**, including:

1. electric utility shutdowns;
2. transmission projects, renewable siting and permitting, tax changes and incentives and grid development to prevent local blackouts and increase export capability;
3. oil and gas price and production declines;
4. acquisition of utilities, including Blackstone Infrastructure's acquisition of Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM) and Bernhard Capital Partners' acquisition of New Mexico Gas Company;
5. economic and regulatory impacts of the Clean Fuel Standard;
6. a report on the renewable energy production tax credit;
7. a report on the status of community energy efficiency development projects;
8. a report on violations, penalties and lawsuits regarding the Oil and Gas Act, including:
 - a. increasing fees and penalties, as proposed by HB 259 (2025);
 - b. oil and gas bonding, enforcement and reform; and
 - c. proposed funding changes to the Oil Conservation Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD);
9. a report on the San Juan Generating Station facility and mine remediation and restoration study, pursuant to HB 142 (2023);
10. energy and policy 101: interagency work on energy issues and an overview of energy demand and source alternatives in the state;

11. energy efficiency building codes, workforce opportunities and electric vehicle (EV) charger buildout and requirements for new construction;
12. the Solar For All program, community solar and sovereign energy;
13. the Energy Transition Act — Economic Development Department fund projects update;
14. air quality monitoring, state and federal updates on methane and ozone rules and a report on the emissions around oil and gas production sites and creating children's health protection zones, as proposed by HB 35 (2025);
15. an overview of critical mineral mining activity and exploration in the state and wind turbine, copper and critical mineral recycling opportunities;
16. an overview of the oil and gas royalty rate changes, pursuant to SB 23 (2025);
17. Oil and Gas Reclamation Fund changes, as proposed by HB 403 (2025), and a progress report on the plugging of abandoned wells;
18. the creation of a state energy advisory board, as proposed by House Energy, Environment and Natural Resources Committee Substitute for HB 394 (2025), to advance clean energy development in the state; and
19. nuclear energy development, the potential for a domestic recycling program for spent nuclear fuel and impacts of tritium venting, uranium and other mining and processing on environmental and public health;

C. topics concerning **natural resources, conservation and climate**, including:

1. an update on the reforestation centers;
2. wildfire issues and mitigation strategies, including:
 - a. insurance cancellations in high-risk areas and an update on the FAIR Plan;
 - b. post-fire flooding concerns and restoration efforts;
 - c. creating buffers between wildland-urban interfaces, pursuant to HB 175 (2025);
 - d. changes in federal wildfire response, funding and the United States Forest Service program;

- e. costs of climate change and forest fires on New Mexico's economy and public health;
 - f. risk to utilities and costs to ratepayers;
 - g. utilizing the Forestry Division of the EMNRD's mapping tool to assess priority areas, increase forest management and reduce fire risk; and
 - h. a Wildfire Study Group Report pursuant to Senate Memorial (SM) 2 (2025);
3. state natural resource agencies federal funding gaps, federal administrations' revisions to and elimination of certain federal environmental protections and changes to the federal Environmental Protection Agency;
 4. a Rio Grande Trail update, including designation and limiting liability within special districts, as proposed by HB 29 (2025);
 5. a forest restoration and economic development study report pursuant to Senate Joint Memorial 1 (2025) and implementation of the Timber Grading Act (HB 553) (2025);
 6. Natural Heritage Conservation Act and Land Conservation Incentives Act: accomplishments, updates and proposed reforms;
 7. state parks updates and funding needs;
 8. heat response, mitigation and policy changes: current trends in extreme heat, health impacts and worker protections, as proposed by the Department of Environment's proposed heat illness and injury prevention rule;
 9. updates on the Environmental Database and interagency coordination;
 10. Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund proposed changes;
 11. clean car and trucks rules update: public health impacts of transportation and the economic impacts of EV mandates;
 12. EV battery recycling;
 13. state and federal EV and charger rebates, customer incentives and cost savings from purchasing an EV;
 14. electric school buses;

15. the role of states in action to mitigate climate change and the need for greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets;
16. green technologies and infrastructure;
17. status of federal Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 projects and funding; and
18. waste management, recycling and implementation of the state's circular economy and rulemaking, pursuant to HB 291 (2025); and

D. topics concerning **agriculture, land management and animals**, including:

1. federal land sales;
2. changes to the Department of Game and Fish, the State Game Commission and wildlife management pursuant to SB 5 (2025);
3. a New Mexico Agricultural Workforce Development Program Act update;
4. a New Mexico meat and dairy in schools work group report pursuant to SM 19 (2025);
5. impacts of extreme weather on rural and agricultural communities;
6. food and farm initiatives and a New Mexico Grown Programs update, including:
 - a. 2025 legislative outcomes and state and federal funding concerns;
 - b. the New Mexico Food Charter and its annual "report card" for 2023-2024; and
 - c. market opportunities and sustainable systems for New Mexico farmers, ranchers and food producers to support food security and local economies; and
7. management of wild and free-roaming horses, as proposed by HB 284 (2025).

**Water and Natural Resources Committee
2025 Approved Meeting Schedule**

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Location</u> |
|-----------------|---------------------------|
| June 3 | Santa Fe |
| July 1-2 | Las Vegas |
| August 18-20 | Las Cruces and Alamogordo |
| September 11-12 | Taos |
| October 29-30 | Artesia |
| November 17-18 | Santa Fe |

AGENDAS AND MINUTES

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
FIRST MEETING
of the
WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**June 3, 2025
State Capitol, Room 307
Santa Fe**

Tuesday, June 3

- 9:30 a.m. **Call to Order and Introductions**
—Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, Chair, Water and Natural Resources
 Committee (WNRC)
—Representative Matthew McQueen, Vice Chair, WNRC
- 9:45 a.m. (1) **[Post-Session Report: WNRC-Related Legislation](#)**
—Sara Wiedmaier, Researcher, Legislative Council Service
- 10:30 a.m. (2) **[Discussion of the 2025 Proposed Interim Work Plan and Meeting
Schedule](#)**
—Members, WNRC
- 11:30 a.m. (3) **[Post-Session Budget Report: Natural Resources](#)**
—Austin Davidson, Fiscal Analyst, Legislative Finance Committee
- 12:15 p.m. **Public Comment***
- 12:30 p.m. **Adjourn**

*Members of the public may make virtual public comments during the public comment period of the meeting by following the instructions under the "Virtual Public Comment" section of the WNRC [web page](#).

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

**June 3, 2024
State Capitol, Room 307
Santa Fe**

The first meeting of the Water and Natural Resources Committee (WNRC) was called to order by Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, chair, on Tuesday, June 3, 2025, at 9:31 a.m. in Room 307 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
Rep. Kathleen Cates
Sen. Candy Spence Ezzell
Rep. Miguel P. García
Rep. Jonathan A. Henry
Rep. Joshua N. Hernandez
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana
Sen. Larry R. Scott
Rep. Elaine Sena Cortez
Sen. James G. Townsend
Rep. Martin R. Zamora

Advisory Members

Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. Angel M. Charley
Rep. Nicole Chavez
Rep. Eleanor Chávez
Rep. Martha Garcia
Rep. Charlotte Little
Sen. Linda M. López
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Tara L. Lujan
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Rep. Tanya Mirabal Moya
Rep. Rod Montoya
Rep. Mark B. Murphy
Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero
Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez

Absent

Sen. Joseph Cervantes
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Marian Matthews
Sen. Micaelita Debbie O'Malley
Rep. Kristina Ortez
Rep. Angelica Rubio
Sen. Jeff Steinborn

Rep. Gail Armstrong
Rep. Jack Chatfield
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. Joanne J. Ferrary
Sen. Antonio Maestas
Rep. Javier Martínez
Rep. Randall T. Pettigrew
Rep. Nathan P. Small
Sen. Pat Woods

Sen. Mimi Stewart
Sen. Anthony L. Thornton
Rep. Harlan Vincent
Sen. Peter Wirth

Staff

Sara Wiedmaier, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Galaxy Dancer, Word Processor, 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.

Tuesday, June 3

Welcome and Introductions (9:31 a.m.)

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

Post-Session Report: WNRC-Related Legislation (9:44 a.m.)

Ms. Wiedmaier gave an overview of WNRC-related legislation from the 2025 legislative session that passed, did not pass or was vetoed or partially vetoed by the governor. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=6/3/2025&ItemNumber=1>.

Discussion of the 2025 Work Plan and Meeting Schedule (10:01 a.m.)

Committee members discussed and offered suggestions for revising the WNRC's proposed work plan and meeting schedule for the 2025 interim. Each member stated which issues were of greatest importance for that member's respective constituents. Meeting locations

were debated and are to be determined. The proposed 2025 work plan and meeting schedule can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=6/3/2025&ItemNumber=2>.

Public Comment (10:50 a.m.)

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

Post-Session Budget Report: Natural Resources (10:58 a.m.)

Austin Davidson, fiscal analyst, Legislative Finance Committee, provided a post-session overview of the General Appropriation Act of 2025 and recurring General Fund and other relevant appropriations for state agencies that deal with natural resources. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=6/3/2025&ItemNumber=3>.

Public Comment (11:26 a.m.)

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

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 11:33 a.m.

Revised: July 1, 2025

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
SECOND MEETING
of the
WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**July 1-2, 2025
New Mexico Highlands University
Student Union Ballroom
Las Vegas**

Tuesday, July 1

- 9:30 a.m. **Call to Order and Introductions**
—Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, Chair
—Representative Matthew McQueen, Vice Chair
- 9:45 a.m. (1) **Welcome and Local Updates**
—Neil Woolf, Ed.D., President, New Mexico Highlands University
—David Romero, Mayor, City of Las Vegas
—Harold Garcia, Commissioner, District 1, and Chair, San Miguel County
Board of County Commissioners
- 10:45 a.m. (2) **Acequia Disaster Recovery Efforts**
—Paula Garcia, Executive Director, New Mexico Acequia Association
—Debbie Hughes, Executive Director, New Mexico Association of
Conservation Districts
—John Romero, Director, Highway Operations Support Division,
Department of Transportation (DOT)
—Jonathan Martinez, Acequia Bureau Chief, Interstate Stream Commission
—John Cyle Sharp, Technical Assistance Coordinator/Governmental
Claims Contractor, Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Claims Office, Federal
Emergency Management Agency
- 12:00 noon **Lunch**
- 12:45 p.m. **Public Comment***
- 1:00 p.m. (3) **Northeastern New Mexico Dams: Current Projects and Statewide
Priorities**
—John T. Romero, P.E., Director, Water Rights Division, Office of the
State Engineer (OSE)
—Sushil Chaudhary, Chief, Dam Safety Bureau, OSE

- 2:00 p.m. (4) [Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire Recovery and Funding Status](#)
—Emily Hilla, Program Evaluator II, Legislative Finance Committee
—Ali Rye, Secretary, Homeland Security and Emergency Management Department (DHSEM)
—Jeremy Klass, Bureau Chief, Recovery and Mitigation Bureau, and Deputy State Coordinating Officer, DHSEM
—David Romero, Mayor, City of Las Vegas
- 3:15 p.m. (5) [Drinking Water Systems Impacted by Fires, Floods and Drought](#)
—Jonas Armstrong, Director, Water Protection Division, Department of Environment (NMED)
—Joe Martinez, Chief, Drinking Water Bureau, Water Protection Division, NMED
—Travis Martinez, Utilities Director (Water), City of Las Vegas
- 4:15 p.m. (6) [San Juan Generating Station and Mine Remediation and Restoration Study Report](#)
—Erik Munroe, Program Manager, Coal Mine Reclamation Program, Mining and Minerals Division, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD)
—John Ayarbe, Senior Hydrologist, Daniel B. Stephens & Associates
—Jonas Armstrong, Director, Water Protection Division, NMED
- 5:15 p.m. **Recess**

Wednesday, July 2

- 9:00 a.m. (7) [Post-Fire Flood Issues](#)
—Jonas Armstrong, Director, Water Protection Division, NMED
—Jeremy Klass, Bureau Chief, Recovery and Mitigation Bureau, and Deputy State Coordinating Officer, DHSEM
—John Romero, Director, Highway Operations Support Division, DOT
- 10:00 a.m. (8) [Forest Management: Reforestation Centers, Buffer Program Implementation and Economic Development](#)
—Laura McCarthy, State Forester, Forestry Division, EMNRD
—Owen Burney, Ph.D., Professor, College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, New Mexico State University
—Matt Hurteau, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Biology, University of New Mexico
—Peter Vigil, District Manager, Taos Soil and Water Conservation District
—Gerald Romero, District Manager, Tierra y Montes Soil and Water Conservation District

- 11:15 a.m. (9) **Wildfire Prepared Act Implementation, Fire Planning Task Force Updates and the Fair Access to Insurance Requirements Plan**
—Laura McCarthy, State Forester, Forestry Division, EMNRD
—Alice Kane, Superintendent of Insurance, Office of Superintendent of Insurance
—Julie Rochman, Member, Fire Planning Task Force; Retired Chief Executive Officer, Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety
—Miles Conway, Director, New Mexico Home Builders Association
—Kendra Zacharias, Chair, Governing Committee, New Mexico Property Insurance Program

12:45 p.m. **Public Comment***

1:00 p.m. **Adjourn**

*Members of the public may make virtual public comments during the public comment period of the meeting by following the instructions under the "Virtual Public Comment" section of the Water and Natural Resources Committee [web page](#).

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

**July 1-2, 2025
New Mexico Highlands University
Student Union Ballroom
Las Vegas**

The second meeting of the Water and Natural Resources Committee was called to order by Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, chair, on Tuesday, July 1, 2025, at 9:37 a.m. in the Student Union Ballroom at New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU) in Las Vegas.

Present

Sen. Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, Chair
Rep. Matthew McQueen, Vice Chair
Rep. Micaela Lara Cadena
Sen. Pete Campos
Rep. Kathleen Cates
Rep. Miguel P. García (7/1)
Rep. Jonathan A. Henry
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana
Sen. Larry R. Scott
Rep. Elaine Sena Cortez
Rep. Martin R. Zamora (7/1)

Advisory Members

Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Rep. Jack Chatfield
Rep. Charlotte Little
Rep. Tara L. Lujan (7/2)
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Rep. Tanya Mirabal Moya
Rep. Rod Montoya
Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez
Rep. Harlan Vincent

Absent

Sen. Joseph Cervantes
Sen. Candy Spence Ezzell
Rep. Joseph Franklin Hernandez
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Marian Matthews
Sen. Micaelita Debbie O'Malley
Rep. Kristina Ortez
Rep. Angelica Rubio
Sen. Jeff Steinborn
Sen. James G. Townsend

Rep. Gail Armstrong
Sen. Angel M. Charley
Rep. Nicole Chavez
Rep. Eleanor Chávez
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. Joanne J. Ferrary
Rep. Martha Garcia
Sen. Linda M. López
Rep. Stefani Lord
Sen. Antonio Maestas
Rep. Javier Martínez
Rep. Mark B. Murphy
Rep. Randall T. Pettigrew
Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero
Rep. Nathan P. Small
Sen. Mimi Stewart
Sen. Anthony L. Thornton
Sen. Peter Wirth
Sen. Pat Woods

Guest Legislator

Rep. Anita Gonzales

(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

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

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Tuesday, July 1**Welcome and Introductions (9:37 a.m.)**

Senator Stefanics welcomed everyone, and committee members introduced themselves.

Welcome and Local Updates (9:50 a.m.)

Neil Woolf, Ed.D., president, NMHU, presented information on projects and programs at NMHU, including new doctorate programs and collaborations on issues concerning water systems, economic development, housing and reforestation.

David Romero, mayor, City of Las Vegas, discussed the enduring challenges from the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon (HPCC) fire and subsequent flooding that impacted the city's water supply and infrastructure. He highlighted a successful river cleanup project and said that the city is bracing for future flooding this summer.

Approval of Minutes (10:38 a.m.)

On a motion made and seconded, the minutes of the June 3, 2025 meeting were adopted.

Acequia Disaster Recovery Efforts (10:40 a.m.)

Paula Garcia, executive director, New Mexico Acequia Association, discussed recovery efforts for acequias damaged by wildfires and floods since 2022 and provided policy

recommendations that include expanding state resources for specialized technical assistance. Debbie Hughes, executive director, New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts, discussed acequia damage assessments after the HPCC fire and local implementation of the federal Emergency Watershed Protection Program. She noted important partnerships made amid cuts to the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

John Romero, director, Highway Operations Support Division, Department of Transportation (DOT), discussed the DOT's acequia recovery work since the HPCC and Black wildfires, noting challenges with up-front costs and administrative workload.

Jonathan Martinez, chief, Acequia Bureau, Interstate Stream Commission, gave an overview of the Acequia and Community Ditch Infrastructure Fund, which helps meet cost-share requirements of infrastructure projects and provides for assistance with hazard mitigation and disaster recovery. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=7/1/2025&ItemNumber=2>.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Northeastern New Mexico Dams: Current Projects and Statewide Priorities (12:55 p.m.)

John T. Romero, P.E., director, Water Resource Allocation Program and Water Rights Division, Office of the State Engineer (OSE), recommended legislation to increase penalties for violations of water laws. Sushil Chaudhary, D.Eng., P.E., chief, Dam Safety Bureau, OSE, presented an overview of state-regulated dams, which he said have a mean age of 64 years and the majority of which have high hazard potential due to lack of routine maintenance. He described the condition of dams in the northeast part of the state, including urgent situations at the Cimarroncito, Eagle Nest and Lake Maloya dams in Colfax County. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=7/1/2025&ItemNumber=3>.

HPCC Fire Recovery and Funding Status (2:00 p.m.)

Emily Hilla, program evaluator, Legislative Finance Committee, gave a brief update on wildfire recovery funding provided by Senate Bill 6 (2023) and House Bill 1 (2024, 1st Special Session) and the status of federal reimbursements. She said that competing priorities emerging from post-fire flooding events have impacted effective utilization of the funding.

Ali Rye, state director and deputy secretary, Homeland Security and Emergency Management Department (DHSEM), explained the DHSEM's role in ensuring that emergency funding is used appropriately. She said that FEMA is keeping incident periods for the HPCC,

Salt and South Fork fires open so funds can be acquired as late damage occurs from post-fire hazards. Jeremy Klass, bureau chief, Recovery and Mitigation Bureau, DHSEM, briefly discussed collaborating with other states and the federal government to enhance wildfire resiliency across the region and address post-fire impacts in the state.

Mayor Romero stated that post-fire cascading events have made commencing recovery projects difficult. He said that the city's main focus is protecting the watershed, which has hindered the documentation of emergency funds used for temporary water treatment and debris cleanup projects. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=7/1/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

Drinking Water Systems Impacted by Fires, Floods and Drought (3:03 p.m.)

Jonas Armstrong, director, Water Protection Division, Department of Environment (NMED), and Joe Martinez, chief, Drinking Water Bureau, Water Protection Division, NMED, discussed the impacts to water systems and recovery efforts in Las Vegas and Ruidoso from post-wildfire flooding. Mr. Armstrong said that infrastructure fragility is the major cause of compounding disasters and recommended that communities and the state make appropriate investments in infrastructure, staff, training, oversight and data gathering. Bureau chief Martinez echoed the need for more water operators to respond to rapidly growing needs.

Travis Martinez, utilities director, City of Las Vegas, detailed the enduring challenges to the city's water infrastructure since the HPCC fire. He explained that the city and many state and federal entities are working on recovery efforts, but the cascading emergencies and financial impacts have been staggering. He advised other communities to plan for disasters by knowing a system's weak points, pre-positioning emergency contacts and assessing temporary treatment or backup water source options. He requested committee support for sustained, flexible funding and proactive investment in planning, workforce development and equipment. Robert Anaya, city manager, City of Las Vegas, added that a framework and time line for an improved city water system is being developed and acknowledged that more accountability for emergency state funds is needed. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=7/1/2025&ItemNumber=5>.

San Juan Generating Station (SJGS) and Mine Remediation and Restoration Study Report (4:01 p.m.)

John Ayarbe, senior hydrologist, Daniel B. Stephens & Associates, discussed environmental conditions at the former SJGS. He said that the current ground water quality is poor, but the existing mine closure plan is adequate and once reclamation is complete, ground water levels are expected to recover.

Mr. Armstrong and George Schuman, program manager, Remediation Oversight Section, Ground Water Quality Bureau, Water Protection Division, NMED, discussed oversight of the decommissioning of the SJGS. Mr. Armstrong said that ground water contamination is the primary environmental concern at the site, and the bureau is monitoring the effectiveness of remediation. Mr. Schuman said that 50 years of permit data has been gathered, but new data is needed to fill in gaps and determine how best to investigate the entire 200-acre site.

Sherrick Roanhorse, senior government affairs manager, Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM), said that while PNM is in the early stages of SJGS site negotiations, PNM is committed to and currently working with the NMED and stakeholders on remediation and restoration of the site. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=7/1/2025&ItemNumber=6>.

Recess

The meeting recessed at 4:45 p.m.

Wednesday, July 2

Reconvene

The meeting reconvened at 9:04 a.m.

Post-Fire Flood Issues (9:06 a.m.)

Mr. Armstrong explained that the NMED has provided hundreds of hours of technical assistance following recent disasters and that affected water systems in general have been stabilized. He said that the NMED continues to provide assistance as issues arise to maintain compliance and manage communities' responsibility to provide safe, reliable drinking water and discussed available funding to help prepare for water emergencies.

Mr. Klass discussed how the DHSEM is addressing watershed restoration after recent disasters by integrating local emergency operations with incident management teams and developing technologies to address immediate needs. He said that federal programs are not structured to address the cascading impacts inherent in post-fire landscapes, and there is apprehension about the future of federal funding. He expressed the need for more state investment in emergency management and coordination across agencies and states in the region.

DOT division director Romero discussed damages to roadways, bridges and drainage structures from post-fire floods and major recovery work that has been completed. He explained that the DOT performs a majority of emergency repairs in-house because it is faster and less expensive and it helps to cross-train new employees. He stated that some areas can take three or more years to stabilize after a wildfire and that repairs from the HPCC fire have cost the department \$122 million. He lauded the DOT's first-responder capabilities, pointing out that crews are trained to use certain firefighting equipment and assist with transporting materials, fuel

and water and opening old logging roads. He advocated for stabilization of the State Road Fund because use of the fund for emergencies is depleting resources for regular maintenance and construction. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=7/1/2025&ItemNumber=7>.

Forest Management: Reforestation Centers, Buffer Program Implementation and Economic Development (10:15 a.m.)

Laura McCarthy, state forester, Forestry Division, EMNRD, discussed protection of wildland-urban interfaces during wildfires. She briefly explained how buffers work, the mitigation mapping done by the Fire Planning Task Force and the effects of buffered areas. She also discussed a report from the Wildfire Study Group due by November 1, 2025 and a joint study by the EMNRD and the Economic Development Department for forest restoration through economic development.

Matt Hurteau, Ph.D., professor, Department of Biology, University of New Mexico, discussed challenges to reforestation after high-severity wildfires, such as having to manually replant trees, low survival rates and seedling and nursery shortages. He stated that outcomes could be improved by developing training for the collection and planting of seeds.

Owen Burney, Ph.D., professor, College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, and director, John T. Harrington Forestry Research Center, New Mexico State University, discussed the reforestation needs of the state, which include seed collection, nursery production, planting, growth monitoring and more trained professionals. He stated that it would take more than 500 years to reforest with the state's current capacity, and ongoing research is needed to develop science-based solutions to gaps in the reforestation pipeline.

Peter Vigil, district manager, Taos Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), discussed his work with public outreach, developing natural-resource policy and dealing with unpredictable climate issues in Taos. He stated that his primary role is to make land stewards out of landowners while educating landowners to teach others and engage with youth to continue that work. Gerald Romero, district manager, Tierra y Montes SWCD, talked about coordinating available resources to meet the needs of local land users and presented challenges to forest management, including funding, terrain and landowner participation. He recommended more funding for land-management agencies and implementing watershed-scale treatments across jurisdictional boundaries to make a bigger impact. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=7/1/2025&ItemNumber=8>.

Wildfire Prepared Act Implementation, Fire Planning Task Force Updates and the Fair Access to Insurance Requirements (FAIR) Plan (12:12 p.m.)

Ms. McCarthy briefly discussed the implementation of Senate Bill 33 (2025), including an update on the Fire Planning Task Force, technical standards and multipurpose mapping projects and the EMNRD's intention to adopt Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS) damage mitigation standards.

Alice Kane, superintendent of insurance, Office of Superintendent of Insurance, gave a brief update on the FAIR Plan, reporting that the insurance industry has increased homeowner and business policy cancellations and nonrenewals in areas considered high-risk for wildfires. She believes that there is an insurance-access crisis and that, because of emergency situations, access to insurance that has not traditionally been available is needed. She stated that policyholders could apply wildfire-mitigation measures to get back into the open market, noting that some companies will give a discount for such measures. She said the OSI supports legislation that would increase coverage limits and clarify coverage for certain excluded risks.

Julie Rochman, member, Fire Planning Task Force, and retired chief executive officer, IBHS, presented on effective ways to reduce property hazards from natural disasters, including building with Class A roofs, ember-resistant vents and defensible space, that could make properties more insurable and homeowners more willing to evacuate in an emergency.

Miles Conway, director, New Mexico Home Builders Association, discussed the cost of fire-mitigation standards in homebuilding. He listed ways in which New Mexico could be a model for other states, including creating programs in support of retrofits to existing structures and workforce training and certifications. He said that the state will have to find ways to balance affordability with fire resiliency and insurability and the conflict between high-density housing and the ideal standard of 50-foot separation between buildings.

Kendra Zacharias, chair, Governing Committee, New Mexico Property Insurance Program (NMPPI), gave a brief history of the FAIR Plan and explained that the NMPPI provides coverage only to qualified applicants that are unable to obtain property insurance in the open market. She discussed the types of coverage provided, rates and assessments and coverage limits. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=7/1/2025&ItemNumber=9>.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 1:32 p.m.

Revised: August 18, 2025

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
THIRD MEETING
of the
WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**August 18-20, 2025
Stan Fulton Athletics Center
New Mexico State University
1815 Wells Street
Las Cruces**

Monday, August 18

- 9:30 a.m. **Call to Order and Introductions**
—Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, Chair
—Representative Matthew McQueen, Vice Chair
- 9:45 a.m. (1) **Welcome and Local Updates**
—Valerio Ferme, Ph.D., President, New Mexico State University (NMSU)
—Eric Enriquez, Mayor, City of Las Cruces
—Christopher Schaljo-Hernandez, Commissioner, District 1, and Chair,
Dona Ana County Board of County Commissioners
- 10:45 a.m. (2) **Impact of Federal Funding Cuts on New Mexico Food Systems**
—Austin Davidson, Fiscal Analyst, Legislative Finance Committee
—Les Owen, Deputy Director, New Mexico Department of Agriculture
(NMDA)
—Michael A. Chavez, Director, Student Success and Wellness Bureau,
Public Education Department (PED)
—Niki Kozlowski, Acting Deputy Secretary, Health Care Authority
—Sarah E. Flores-Sievers, Chief, Food and Nutrition Bureau, and Director,
Women, Infants and Children and Farmers' Market Nutrition
Programs, Department of Health (DOH)
—Denise King, Director, Aging Network Services Division, Aging and
Long-Term Services Department
- 12:00 noon **Public Comment***
- 12:15 p.m. **Lunch**

- 1:00 p.m. (3) **Local Food Access: Suppliers, Community Partners and the Role of State Agencies**
- Alena Paisano, Director, Approved Supplier Program, New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association
 - Erin Ortigoza, Program Manager, Food, Hunger, and Agriculture Program, Economic Development Department
 - Veronica Griego, Manager, Women, Infants and Children and Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs, DOH
 - Liz Anichini, Healthy Universal School Meals Program Manager, Student Success and Wellness Bureau, PED
 - Mario Holguin, Manager, Farm Fresh Program, La Semilla Food Center; Farmer and Owner, Rio Abajo Farm
 - Johannes Lencer, Chief Operating Officer, National Center for Frontier Communities
- 2:15 p.m. (4) **Water and Natural Resources Workforce Development, Part 1: Archaeological Review Training, Agriculture and Water Technology Programs**
- Sarita Nair, Secretary, Workforce Solutions Department
 - John Taylor-Montoya, Ph.D., Executive Director, Office of Archaeological Studies, Cultural Affairs Department
 - Jessie Greenspan, Manager, Strategic Initiatives and Government Relations, Cultural Affairs Department
 - Max Henkels, Director, Agricultural Programs and Resources Division, NMDA
 - Debbie Hughes, Farmer, Rancher and Co-Owner, Hughes Ranch; Executive Director, New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts
 - Monica F. Torres, Ph.D., Chancellor, Dona Ana Community College
- 3:15 p.m. (5) **In-State Meat Processing: Progress and Challenges**
- Kayla Sjoberg, Deputy Director, Meat and Poultry Inspection, New Mexico Livestock Board
 - Nicholas Frazzini, Senior Agriculture Marketing Specialist, Marketing and Development Division, NMDA
 - Michelle Thomas, President, New Mexico Meat Processors Association, Co-Owner, A & M Meat Processing LLC
 - John Richardson, Owner, Slash Ranch; Owner, Fiesta Meats Processing
 - Manny Encinias, Ph.D., Owner, Trilogy Beef Community LLC; Owner, Buffalo Creek Ranch; Executive Director, Santa Fe Farmers' Market Institute

- 4:30 p.m. (6) [Weather Stations, Water Resilience and the Impacts of Drought and Extreme Weather on Agriculture](#)
—Dave Dubois, Ph.D., State Climatologist, Office of State Climatologist, NMSU
—Sam Fernald, Ph.D., Director, New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute
—Debbie Hughes, Farmer, Rancher and Co-Owner, Hughes Ranch; Executive Director, New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts

5:15 p.m. **Recess**

Tuesday, August 19

- 9:00 a.m. (7) [State Parks Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department: Economic Impact and Contribution Analysis](#)
—Toby Velasquez, Director, State Parks Division, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department
—Kramer Winingham, Ph.D., Program Director, Arrowhead Center, NMSU
- 9:45 a.m. (8) [Las Cruces Electrification Plan, Community Solar and Community Energy Efficiency Development Projects](#)
—Jenny Hernandez, Sustainability Officer, City of Las Cruces
—Angie Rodriguez, Manager, Electrification, El Paso Electric
—Lucas Herndon, Energy Policy Director, ProgressNow New Mexico
- 10:45 a.m. (9) [Lower Rio Grande Water Management and Conservation Strategies](#)
—Hannah Riseley-White, Director, Interstate Stream Commission
—Joshua L. Smith, Treasurer-Manager, Elephant Butte Irrigation District
—Adrienne Widmer, Utilities Director, City of Las Cruces
- 11:45 a.m. (10) [Texas v. New Mexico Status Update](#)
—Nat Chakeres, General Counsel, Office of the State Engineer (OSE)
—Hannah Riseley-White, Director, Interstate Stream Commission
- 12:00 noon **Public Comment***
- 12:15 p.m. **Lunch**
- 1:00 p.m. **Tour of the El Paso, Texas, Kay Bailey Hutchison Desalination and Blue Brine Plants (Legislators and Staff Only)**

Wednesday, August 20

- 9:00 a.m. (11) **Fifty-Year Water Action Plan**
—Tanya Trujillo, Deputy State Engineer, OSE
—John S. Rhoderick, Deputy Secretary for Administration, Department of Environment (NMED)
—Sam Fernald, Ph.D., Director, New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute
- 10:00 a.m. (12) **Strategic Water Supply: Brackish Water Development**
—Tanya Trujillo, Deputy State Engineer, OSE
—John S. Rhoderick, Deputy Secretary for Administration, NMED
—Pei Xu, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, NMSU
- 11:00 a.m. (13) **Surface Water Quality Permitting Program Implementation**
—Shelly Lemon, Chief, Surface Water Quality Bureau, Water Protection Division, NMED
—John Rhoderick, Deputy Secretary for Administration, NMED
—Steven Perez, Deputy Director, Regulatory Compliance, Utilities Department, City of Las Cruces; Member, Surface Water Advisory Panel
—Tricia Snyder, Director, Rivers and Waters Program, New Mexico Wild
—Dalva "Dal" Moellenberg, Gallagher & Kennedy; Representative, New Mexico Oil and Gas Association and New Mexico Mining Association
- 12:15 p.m. **Adjourn**

*Members of the public may make virtual public comments during the public comment period of the meeting by following the instructions under the "Additional Information" section of the Water and Natural Resources Committee [web page](#).

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

**August 18-20, 2025
Stan Fulton Athletics Center
New Mexico State University
1815 Wells Street
Las Cruces**

The third meeting of the Water and Natural Resources Committee (WNRC) was called to order by Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, chair, at 9:35 a.m. on Monday, August 18, 2025, in the Stan Fulton Athletics Center at New Mexico State University (NMSU) in Las Cruces.

Present

Sen. Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, Chair
Rep. Matthew McQueen, Vice Chair
Rep. Micaela Lara Cadena
Sen. Pete Campos (8/18)
Rep. Kathleen Cates
Sen. Joseph Cervantes
Rep. Jonathan A. Henry
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana
Sen. Larry R. Scott
Rep. Elaine Sena Cortez
Sen. Jeff Steinborn (8/18, 8/19)
Sen. James G. Townsend (8/18)
Rep. Martin R. Zamora

Advisory Members

Rep. Gail Armstrong (8/18)
Rep. Charlotte Little (8/18)
Rep. Rod Montoya
Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero
Sen. Anthony L. Thornton
Rep. Harlan Vincent (8/18)

Absent

Sen. Candy Spence Ezzell
Rep. Miguel P. García
Rep. Joseph Franklin Hernandez
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Marian Matthews
Sen. Micaelita Debbie O'Malley
Rep. Kristina Ortez
Rep. Angelica Rubio

Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. Angel M. Charley
Rep. Jack Chatfield
Rep. Nicole Chavez
Rep. Eleanor Chávez
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. Joanne J. Ferrary
Rep. Martha Garcia
Sen. Linda M. López
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Tara L. Lujan
Sen. Antonio Maestas
Rep. Javier Martínez
Rep. Angelita Mejia

Rep. Tanya Mirabal Moya
Rep. Mark B. Murphy
Rep. Randall T. Pettigrew
Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez
Rep. Nathan P. Small
Sen. Mimi Stewart
Sen. Peter Wirth
Sen. Pat Woods

Guest Legislators

Rep. Rebecca Dow (8/18)
Sen. Carrie Hamblen (8/19)

(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
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.

Monday, August 18

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

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

Welcome and Local Updates (9:41 a.m.)

Valerio Ferme, Ph.D., president, NMSU, expressed pride about increased enrollment at NMSU and its crucial research and work on water issues. Eric Enriquez, mayor, City of Las Cruces, voiced concern about water usage and conservation amidst the city's growth. Christopher Schaljo-Hernandez, county commissioner, District 1, and chair, Dona Ana County

Board of County Commissioners, discussed leveraging public-private partnerships to develop a desalination plant and bringing new sources of potable water to residents in the sprawling Santa Teresa area.

Impact of Federal Funding Cuts on New Mexico Food Systems (10:50 a.m.)

Austin Davidson, fiscal analyst, Legislative Finance Committee, provided a summary of the recently passed federal budget reconciliation bill and the bill's tax and revenue impacts and a list of and time line for the major changes to Medicaid and federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Les Owen, deputy director, New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA), discussed impacts from reduced federal funding for agriculture, including to produce safety and sustainable farming programs, and noted key tax benefits and the expansion of farm safety net programs.

Niki Kozlowski, acting deputy secretary, Health Care Authority (HCA), outlined changes to SNAP benefits that are projected to impact the state's economy and local taxes. She recommended improved training for caseworkers and more staff for the Income Support Division of the HCA to reduce payment-error rates and increase federal contributions. Sarah E. Flores-Sievers, chief, Food and Nutrition Bureau, and director, Senior and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs, Department of Health (DOH), discussed participation levels in the state WIC program, cuts to monthly fruit and vegetable benefits and how the state has modernized the WIC program by integrating it with SNAP, Medicaid and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families programs.

Michael A. Chavez, director, Student Success and Wellness Bureau, Public Education Department (PED), discussed navigating the funding changes to SNAP and other government programs in public schools. He addressed the impacts to local food procurement and stressed the importance of participation in the federal Community Eligibility Provision, which allows schools to serve free meals to all students if a certain percentage qualifies for federal benefits. Denise King, director, Aging Network Services Division, Aging and Long-Term Services Department, discussed food insecurity among older adults and the importance of interagency monitoring of the state's aging population. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/18/2025&ItemNumber=2>.

Public Comment (1:04 p.m.)

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

Local Food Access: Suppliers, Community Partners and the Role of State Agencies (1:27 p.m.)

Alena Paisano, director, New Mexico Grown Approved Supplier Program (ASP), New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association, discussed the ASP and Double Up Food Bucks programs and capacity-building for farmers' markets and rural grocery retail infrastructure. Erin Ortigoza, program manager, Food, Hunger and Agriculture Program, Economic Development

Department, provided an update on the Healthy Food Financing Fund and other grant programs that address workforce development challenges and assist businesses that provide affordable food to underserved communities.

Veronica Griego, manager, Senior and WIC and Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs, DOH, presented on the Senior and WIC programs' agricultural support, statewide food distribution and emergency food response services. Liz Anichini, program manager, Healthy Universal School Meals, Student Success and Wellness Bureau, PED, discussed successes of the New Mexico Grown program in school cafeterias and senior centers, stating that the future of the program depends on increased participation and consistent funding across agencies.

Mario Holguin, manager, Farm Fresh Program, La Semilla Food Center, and farmer and owner, Rio Abajo Farm, and Johannes Lencer, chief operating officer, National Center for Frontier Communities, discussed the function of food hubs in strengthening local food systems and stabilizing food supply chains. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/18/2025&ItemNumber=3>.

Water and Natural Resources Workforce Development, Part 1: Archaeological Review Training, Agriculture and Water Technology Programs (3:11 p.m.)

Sarita Nair, secretary, Workforce Solutions Department, discussed in-demand occupations, training and economic development initiatives and future actions needed to increase the agricultural sector workforce. John Taylor-Montoya, Ph.D., executive director, Office of Archaeological Studies (OAS), Cultural Affairs Department, discussed the OAS's services and fieldwork training program, which is designed to develop a workforce in cultural resource management and historical preservation.

Max Henkels, director, Agricultural Programs and Resources Division, NMDA, discussed the Agricultural Workforce Development Program, which covers up to 50% of the costs of three internships per year for food and agricultural businesses. He discussed examples of internships and interagency collaborations to address agricultural workforce challenges. Debbie Hughes, farmer, rancher and co-owner, Hughes Ranch, and executive director, New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts, said that there is a critical need for cultural survey training and capacity building for soil and water conservation districts.

Monica F. Torres, Ph.D., chancellor, Dona Ana Community College, discussed the important jobs that water technicians perform, such as monitoring treatment systems, regulatory compliance and other safety measures. She outlined workforce, career pathway and capacity needs for water operators in the state. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/18/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

In-State Meat Processing: Progress and Challenges (4:18 p.m.)

Kayla Sjoberg, deputy director, Meat and Poultry Inspection Program, New Mexico Livestock Board, gave an update on the state meat inspection program, which aims to provide guidance and resources to meat processors. Nicholas Frazzini, senior agriculture marketing specialist, Marketing and Development Division, NMDA, provided livestock industry statistics and discussed common industry challenges, including workforce development, product diversification and in-state processing capacity. Michelle Thomas, president, New Mexico Meat Processors Association, and co-owner, A & M Meat Processing LLC, stressed the importance of a state inspection program to enable local products to be sold in the state without the high overhead and lengthy process of federal inspection. She outlined major challenges, including dedicated infrastructure and funding and building code restrictions.

John Richardson, owner, Slash Ranch, and owner, Fiesta Meats Processing, expressed appreciation for the state meat inspection program and the Local Meat Processing Grant and said that more feedlots and processing plants are needed to keep locally grown beef in the state. Manny Encinias, Ph.D., owner, Trilogy Beef Community LLC; owner, Buffalo Creek Ranch; and executive director, Santa Fe Farmers' Market Institute, gave his perspective on the meat production industry and discussed the importance of the New Mexico Grown program. He stated concerns about workforce and capacity needs, especially in northern regions of the state. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/18/2025&ItemNumber=5>.

Weather Stations, Water Resilience and the Impacts of Drought and Extreme Weather on Agriculture (5:05 p.m.)

Dave Dubois, Ph.D., state climatologist, Office of State Climatologist, NMSU, presented state drought statistics, including reservoir storage, wind speeds, mean temperatures and soil moisture, noting that the western region of the state is struggling the most with long-term drought. Sam Fernald, Ph.D., director, New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute (WRRI), provided an overview of the WRRI's Agricultural Water Resilience Program (AgWRP), which incentivizes conservation and modernizing operations to increase efficiency and resilience to drought conditions. Ms. Hughes added that weather stations are critical for receiving federal drought insurance and that the AgWRP needs increased funding to enable more sustainable and profitable agricultural operations. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/18/2025&ItemNumber=6>.

Recess

The meeting recessed at 5:46 p.m.

Tuesday, August 19

Reconvene

The meeting reconvened at 9:06 a.m.

**State Parks Division of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department:
Economic Impact and Contribution Analysis (9:07 a.m.)**

Toby Velasquez, director, State Parks Division, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, and Kramer Winingham, Ph.D., program director, Arrowhead Center, NMSU, discussed the Arrowhead Center's analysis of the economic and social benefits of New Mexico's state parks for fiscal years 2019 through 2024. The study detailed that economic contributions were significantly higher than expenditures and significant social and nonmarket benefits were achieved through recreation uses. Mr. Velasquez added that the State Parks Division has a 38% vacancy rate for law enforcement positions and requested more funding to increase wages and enhance workforce recruitment. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/18/2025&ItemNumber=7>.

**Las Cruces Electrification Plan, Community Solar and Community Energy Efficiency
Development Projects (10:12 a.m.)**

Jenny Hernandez, sustainability officer, City of Las Cruces, talked briefly about the city's climate action program and incentives to meet the city's electrification goals, including the Plugged-In for Good program that provides complimentary home-energy analysis and helps fund weatherization issues for residents. Angie Rodriguez, manager, Electrification, El Paso Electric (EPE), said that the adoption rate of electric vehicles (EVs) has grown in the city, and the EPE's most successful programs are rebates for electric bicycles and turnkey solutions for businesses to install EV charging stations. Lucas Herndon, energy policy director, ProgressNow New Mexico, discussed community solar projects in Dona Ana County and provided recommendations for state policy changes to address current federal limitations. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/18/2025&ItemNumber=8>.

Lower Rio Grande Water Management and Conservation Strategies (11:32 a.m.)

Hannah Riseley-White, director, Interstate Stream Commission (ISC), discussed water management strategies in the lower Rio Grande and initiatives underway at the ISC, including ground water conservation, storm water capture and brackish water development. Joshua L. Smith, treasurer-manager, Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID), provided information on the priorities of the EBID, including partnerships throughout the west, irrigation efficiency and the need for infrastructure to capture and hold storm water. Adrienne Widmer, utilities director, City of Las Cruces, discussed water operations in Las Cruces, including proactive planning based on growth trends, wastewater treatment, advanced metering to find leaks in the system and

the city's water development and conservation plans. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/18/2025&ItemNumber=9>.

Texas v. New Mexico Status Update (12:32 p.m.)

Nat Chakeres, general counsel, Office of the State Engineer (OSE), and Ms. Riseley-White gave a brief summary of settlements that would resolve some of the disputes being litigated in *Texas v. New Mexico*. Settlement documents are to be finalized by August 29, 2025, with a hearing to take place in the fall. A report and recommendation will then be prepared for the United States Supreme Court, which will make the ultimate decision on the settlement. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/18/2025&ItemNumber=10>.

Public Comment (12:42 p.m.)

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

Recess and Tour of the Kay Bailey Hutchison (KBH) Desalination and Blue Brine Plants in El Paso, Texas

The meeting recessed at 1:03 p.m. for a tour of the KBH desalination facility in El Paso, Texas, which converts brackish ground water into fresh water to supplement the city's water supply. The tour then moved on to the Blue Brine plant, which aims to extract marketable minerals from the KBH plant's brine concentrate and return potable water back to the KBH plant. While the brine plant is still under construction, the process could be a breakthrough for inland desalination, offering a way to manage brine concentrate and reduce environmental impacts.

Wednesday, August 20

Reconvene

The meeting reconvened at 9:06 a.m.

Fifty-Year Water Action Plan (9:07 a.m.)

Tanya Trujillo, deputy state engineer, OSE, and John S. Rhoderick, deputy secretary for administration, Department of Environment (NMED), discussed elements of the fifty-year water action plan and the progress made in 2025 on infrastructure, restoration and development of new sources. Dr. Fernald discussed the AgWRP's approaches to agricultural water resilience and metrics developed to track the impacts of individual grant projects. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/18/2025&ItemNumber=11>.

Strategic Water Supply: Brackish Water Development (10:32 a.m.)

Ms. Trujillo and Mr. Rhoderick discussed the Strategic Water Supply Program, which seeks to provide new water for community uses, protect and preserve freshwater resources, promote local economies and create jobs by providing grants and contracts to eligible entities for projects to utilize treated brackish water. Pei Xu, Ph.D., professor, Department of Civil Engineering, NMSU, discussed brackish ground water quality characterization and ongoing research focused on developing technologies to improve water recovery and valorize brine concentrate with marketable products. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/18/2025&ItemNumber=12>.

Surface Water Quality Permitting Program (SWPP) Implementation (11:34 a.m.)

Shelly Lemon, chief, Surface Water Quality Bureau, Water Protection Division, NMED, gave an update on efforts to initiate a permitting program to protect state waters that are no longer protected federally and discussed estimated program costs and permitting fees. Mr. Rhoderick commented that the program will allow New Mexico to take control of its water and develop the program for the benefit of all.

Steven Perez, deputy director, Regulatory Compliance, Utilities Department, City of Las Cruces, discussed the city's wastewater treatment facilities and its participation with the Surface Water Advisory Panel and listed benefits and concerns of the SWPP from a municipal perspective. Tricia Snyder, director, Rivers and Waters Program, New Mexico Wild, presented an estimate that up to 95% of the state's rivers, streams and wetlands have lost federal protections as a result of the *Sackett v. Environmental Protection Agency* ruling and discussed the need for the SWPP to be adequately resourced with equitable fees for permit holders. Dalva "Dal" Moellenberg, attorney, Gallagher & Kennedy, and representative, New Mexico Oil and Gas Association and New Mexico Mining Association, discussed uncertainty about the permitting process from a business perspective, including how long the process would take, what the costs and requirements will be and distinguishing waters of the state and waters of the United States. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=8/18/2025&ItemNumber=13>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 12:23 p.m.

Revised: September 10, 2025

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for 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**

Thursday, September 11

- 9:15 a.m. **Call to Order and Introductions**
—Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, Chair, Water and Natural Resources
Committee (WNRC)
—Representative Matthew McQueen, Vice Chair, WNRC
- 9:30 a.m. (1) **Welcome and Local Updates**
—Mary Gutierrez, Ed.D., Chancellor, University of New Mexico-Taos
—Pascualito Maestas, Mayor, Town of Taos
- 10:15 a.m. (2) **Pollinator Protection Plan: Next Steps**
—Kamaile DeLong, State Pest Survey Coordinator and Apiary Specialist,
New Mexico Department of Agriculture; 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; Queen Bee
Breeder, Zia Queenbees Farm & Field Institute
—Eduardo Linares, Owner and Beekeeper, Enchanted Land Honey
- 11:15 a.m. (3) **Community Resilience and Wildfire Mitigation: Microgrids, Energy
Storage and Public Safety Power Shutoffs**
—Rebecca "Puck" Stair, Director, Energy Conservation and Management
Division, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department
(EMNRD)
—Luis A. Reyes Jr., Chief Executive Officer, Kit Carson Electric
Cooperative
—Lee Boughey, Vice President, Member Experience, Tri-State Generation
and Transmission Association, Inc.
—Wes Gray, Vice President, Operations and Engineering, Public Service
Company of New Mexico

- 12:15 p.m. **Lunch**
- 1:00 p.m. (4) **Land Conservation Incentives Act**
—Jonathan Hayden, Executive Director, New Mexico Land Conservancy
—Ben Shelton, Deputy Secretary, EMNRD
—Esteban Muldavin, Ph.D., Landowner; Division Leader and Ecology
 Coordinator, Natural Heritage New Mexico
—Cecilia Rosacker, Executive Director, Rio Grande Agricultural Land
 Trust
- 2:00 p.m. (5) **Rio Grande Trail (RGT) Progress Update**
—Carl Colonius, Program Manager, New Mexico Outdoor Recreation
 Division, Economic Development Department
—Ben Bajema, Chair, RGT Commission; Senior Advisor to the Secretary,
 EMNRD
—Casey Ish, Water Resources Specialist, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy
 District
- 3:00 p.m. (6) **Land and Water Conservation Fund and Land of Enchantment Legacy
Fund Updates**
—Judy Calman, Policy Director, Audubon New Mexico
—Gillian Joyce, Government Relations, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union;
 Executive Director, Alianza Agricultura de Taos
—Robert Stokes, Ph.D., Program Support Bureau Chief, State Parks
 Division, EMNRD
—Nick Streit, Executive Director, Friends of Rio Grande del Norte
- 4:00 p.m. (7) **Department of Game and Fish Reform Implementation**
—Michael B. Sloane, Director, Department of Game and Fish
—Jon Hayes, Executive Director, Audubon Southwest
—Jesse Deubel, Executive Director, New Mexico Wildlife Federation
- 5:00 p.m. **Public Comment***
- 5:15 p.m. **Recess**

Friday, September 12

- 8:30 a.m. (8) **Acequia Capacity Building and Technical Assistance**
—Paula Garcia, Executive Director, New Mexico Acequia Association
 (NMAA)
—Jonathan Martinez, Chief, Acequia Bureau, Interstate Stream Commission
 (ISC)
—Manuel Luna, Small Local Public Body Coordinator, Office of the State
 Auditor

- 9:15 a.m. (9) **Water Security Planning Act**
—Hannah Riseley-White, Director, ISC
—Mike Hamman, P.E., Former State Engineer; Member, Executive Committee, New Mexico Water Ambassadors
—Daryl Vigil, Water and Tribes Initiative; Member, New Mexico Water Ambassadors
—Vidal Gonzales, Director of Policy and Planning, NMAA
—Norm Gaume, P.E. (retired), President, New Mexico Water Advocates
- 10:30 a.m. (10) **Strategic Water Reserve Funding**
—Pam Homer, Strategic Water Reserve Technical Lead, ISC
—Steven Fry, Policy and Project Specialist, Amigos Bravos
- 11:00 a.m. (11) **Texas v. New Mexico: Supreme Court Filing Update**
—Elizabeth Anderson, State Engineer, Office of the State Engineer (OSE)
—Nat Chakeres, General Counsel, OSE
—Hannah Riseley-White, Director, ISC
—James Grayson, Chief Deputy Attorney General, State Department of Justice
- 12:00 noon **Adjourn**

*Members of the public may make virtual public comments during the public comment period of the meeting by following the instructions under the "Additional Information" section of the WNRC [web page](#).

**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.

Revised: October 28, 2025

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
FIFTH MEETING
of the
WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**October 29-30, 2025
Bulldogs Administration and Training Center
Bulldogs Rooms 1-4
301 Bulldog Boulevard
Artesia**

Wednesday, October 29

- 9:15 a.m. **Call to Order and Introductions**
—Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, Chair, Water and Natural Resources
Committee (WNRC)
—Representative Matthew McQueen, Vice Chair, WNRC
- 9:30 a.m. (1) **Welcome and Local Updates**
—Representative Jonathan A. Henry, Mayor, City of Artesia
—Hayley Klein, Commissioner, District 2, Eddy County Board of County
Commissioners; Executive Director, Artesia Chamber of Commerce;
City Administrator, City of Artesia
- 10:00 a.m. (2) **Roosevelt Soil and Water Conservation District (RSWCD) Rainfall
Enhancement Program**
—Mike Cone, Chair, RSWCD
—George Bomar, Former State Climatologist, College of Arts and Sciences,
Texas A&M University
—Dave DuBois, Ph.D., State Climatologist, Office of the State
Climatologist, New Mexico Department of Agriculture
- 11:00 a.m. (3) **Cleanup of Neglected Groundwater Spills**
—Kelsey Rader, Deputy Director, Water Protection Division, Department
of Environment (NMED)
—Miori Harms, Uranium Mine Reclamation Coordinator, NMED
—April Elliott, Director, Surface Resources Division, State Land Office
(SLO)
- 12:00 noon **Public Comment***
- 12:15 p.m. **Lunch**

- 1:00 p.m. (4) [**Air Quality Around Oil and Gas Operations and Effectiveness of Methane and Ozone Rules**](#)
—Gunnar Schade, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Texas A&M University
—Michelle Miano, Director, Environmental Protection Division, NMED
—Ben Shelton, Deputy Secretary, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD)
—Debra A. Kaden, Ph.D., Fellow, Academy of Toxicological Sciences; Principal Toxicologist, RHP Risk Management Inc.
- 2:15 p.m. (5) [**Data Centers: Water and Energy Use and Project Jupiter Update**](#)
—Mark Roper, Director, Economic Development Division, Economic Development Department
—Ben Shelton, Deputy Secretary, EMNRD
—Tanya Trujillo, Deputy State Engineer, Office of the State Engineer
—Stacy Tellinghuisen, Deputy Director, Policy Development, Clean Energy Department, Western Resources Advocates
—Daisy Maldonado, Director, Empowerment Congress of Dona Ana County
- 3:30 p.m. **Tour of HF Sinclair Corporation Operations****

Thursday, October 30

- 8:30 a.m. (6) [**Oil and Gas Updates: Production, Price, Royalty Rates and Workforce Development**](#)
—Ben Shelton, Deputy Secretary, EMNRD
—Sunalei Stewart, Deputy Commissioner of Operations, SLO
—Tom Clifford, Ph.D., Clifford Consulting, LLC
—Steve Saucedo, Vice President for Workforce Development, New Mexico Junior College
- 9:30 a.m. (7) [**Oil and Gas Act: Enforcement and Reform; Reclamation Fund Changes; and Plugging of Abandoned Wells**](#)
—Ben Shelton, Deputy Secretary, EMNRD
—Sunalei Stewart, Deputy Commissioner of Operations, SLO
—Sam Bradley, Member, Board of Directors, National Stripper Well Association; Partner, Summit Oil and Gas, LLC
—Erik Schlenker-Goodrich, Executive Director, Western Environmental Law Center (WELC)
- 10:45 a.m. (8) [**Reuse of Treated Produced Water: Technology, Current Rules and Proposed Revisions**](#)
—Kelsey Rader, Deputy Director, Water Protection Division, NMED
—Matthias Sayer, Water Access, Treatment and Reuse Alliance
—Chad Unrau, Vice President of Reuse, Aris Water Solutions

—Sarah Knopp, Policy Specialist, Amigos Bravos
—Daniel Timmons, Senior Attorney, WELC

12:00 noon **Lunch**

12:30 p.m. (9) **[Growing the Fusion Energy Industry in New Mexico](#)**
—Carrie von Muench, Chief Operating Officer, Pacific Fusion
—John Elling, Ph.D., Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Molten Salt
Solutions
—David Ellmann, General Partner, UP.Abundance
—Mark Roper, Director, Economic Development Division, Economic
Development Department

1:30 p.m. **Adjourn**

*Members of the public may make virtual public comments during the public comment period of the meeting by following the instructions under the "Additional Information" section of the WNRC [web page](#).

**Committee members and committee staff only.

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

**October 29-30, 2025
Bulldogs Administration and Training Center
Bulldogs Rooms 1-4
301 Bulldog Boulevard
Artesia**

The fifth meeting of the Water and Natural Resources Committee was called to order by Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, chair, at 9:22 a.m. on Wednesday, October 29, 2025, at the Bulldogs Administration and Training Center in Artesia.

Present

Sen. Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, Chair
Rep. Matthew McQueen, Vice Chair
Rep. Micaela Lara Cadena
Sen. Pete Campos
Rep. Kathleen Cates
Sen. Candy Spence Ezzell
Rep. Jonathan A. Henry
Rep. Joseph Franklin Hernandez
Rep. Angelica Rubio (10/29)
Sen. Larry R. Scott
Rep. Elaine Sena Cortez
Sen. James G. Townsend
Rep. Martin R. Zamora

Advisory Members

Rep. Eleanor Chávez
Rep. Joanne J. Ferrary
Rep. Angelita Mejia
Rep. Rod Montoya
Rep. Mark B. Murphy
Rep. Harlan Vincent
Sen. Pat Woods (10/30)

Absent

Sen. Joseph Cervantes
Rep. Miguel P. García
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Marian Matthews
Sen. Micaelita Debbie O'Malley
Rep. Kristina Ortez
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana
Sen. Jeff Steinborn

Rep. Gail Armstrong
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. Angel M. Charley
Rep. Jack Chatfield
Rep. Nicole Chavez
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. Martha Garcia
Rep. Charlotte Little
Sen. Linda M. López
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Tara L. Lujan
Sen. Antonio Maestas
Rep. Javier Martínez
Rep. Tanya Mirabal Moya
Rep. Randall T. Pettigrew

Rep. Patricia Roybal Caballero
Sen. Antoinette Sedillo Lopez
Rep. Nathan P. Small
Sen. Mimi Stewart
Sen. Anthony L. Thornton
Sen. Peter Wirth

Guest Legislator

Sen. David M. Gallegos (10/30)

(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
Em Green, Staff Attorney, 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.

Wednesday, October 29

Welcome and Introductions (9:22 a.m.)

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

Welcome and Local Updates (9:32 a.m.)

Representative Henry, mayor, City of Artesia, welcomed the committee to Artesia and spotlighted the city's attributes, such as public art installations and Artesia High School's long history of athletic success. He pointed out the major industries in the area, including oil and gas production, agriculture and federal law enforcement training, and noted construction and housing projects supported by public-private partnerships.

Hayley Klein, commissioner, District 2, Eddy County Board of County Commissioners; executive director, Artesia Chamber of Commerce; and city administrator, City of Artesia, spoke about Eddy County's growing agritourism industry, housing development projects and workforce training programs. She also highlighted the county's collaboration with the City of Carlsbad on food distribution programs created in response to the federal government shutdown.

Approval of Minutes (9:55 a.m.)

Upon a motion made and seconded, and without objection, the minutes of the September 11-12, 2025 meeting were adopted.

Roosevelt Soil and Water Conservation District (RSWCD) Rainfall Enhancement Program (9:56 a.m.)

Rick Ledbetter, supervisor, RSWCD, summarized a one-year enhanced rainfall project in eastern New Mexico, provided data showing improvements in drought conditions and requested funding for future rainfall enhancement activities. George Bomar, former Texas state climatologist, College of Arts and Sciences, Texas A&M University, discussed how cloud seeding works and how seeding is regulated in New Mexico. Dave DuBois, Ph.D., state climatologist, Office of the State Climatologist (OSC), New Mexico Department of Agriculture, discussed the OSC's role in the 2025 cloud seeding project and outlined considerations for a statewide rainfall augmentation program. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=10/29/2025&ItemNumber=2>.

Cleanup of Neglected Ground Water Spills (11:05 a.m.)

Kelsey Rader, deputy director, Water Protection Division, Department of Environment (NMED), discussed the allocation of a \$20 million appropriation for addressing reclamation of abandoned mine sites that have no responsible party. Miori Harms, uranium mine reclamation coordinator, NMED, presented on current cleanup projects at neglected uranium mine sites. Both presenters stated a need for sustained funding, diversified investments and a long-term strategy to address water challenges.

April Elliott, director, Surface Resources Division, State Land Office (SLO), briefly discussed ground water contamination by oil and gas activities, how spills are reported and the SLO's current ground water monitoring projects. George Schuman, program manager, Remediation Oversight Section, Ground Water Quality Bureau, NMED, joined during the question-and-answer period to address a query about the distances involved in transporting contaminated materials. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=10/29/2025&ItemNumber=3>.

Public Comment (12:19 p.m.)

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

Air Quality Around Oil and Gas Operations and Effectiveness of Methane and Ozone Rules (1:11 p.m.)

Gunnar Schade, Ph.D., associate professor, Texas A&M University, provided an assessment of air quality in the Permian Basin. He explained that the rise in oil and gas production has affected air quality, particularly through elevated levels of petroleum hydrocarbons, methane and ozone.

Michelle Miano, director, Environmental Protection Division, NMED, discussed preliminary data from 2023's greenhouse gas emissions inventory and emphasized the need for regulatory compliance and stable funding for air quality programs. Ben Shelton, deputy secretary, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), presented an update on New Mexico's methane waste rule, including key implementation dates and reporting requirements, and shared that emissions have remained steady despite rising production levels.

Debra A. Kaden, Ph.D., fellow, Academy of Toxicological Sciences, and principal toxicologist, RHP Risk Management Inc., addressed the presence of ozone and benzene near oil and gas operations, stating that the risk of adverse health effects diminishes at distances beyond one-half of a mile. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=10/29/2025&ItemNumber=4>.

Data Centers: Water and Energy Use and Project Jupiter Update (3:10 p.m.)

Mark Roper, director, Economic Development Division, Economic Development Department, discussed incentive tools for data centers, explaining the potential to boost the state's economy. Mr. Shelton discussed the EMNRD's role in managing grid strain, advancing microgrid policy, ensuring compliance with the Energy Transition Act and leveraging data centers to drive clean energy development. Tanya Trujillo, deputy state engineer, Office of the State Engineer, discussed how the development of a new data center should align with the objectives outlined in the state's 50-year strategic water action plan.

Stacy Tellinghuisen, deputy director, Policy Development, Clean Energy Department, Western Resources Advocates, provided an overview of resource consumption by data centers in western states, highlighted the water and energy tradeoffs associated with various cooling systems and offered policy options to strengthen consumer protections and safeguard water resources and the environment. Daisy Maldonado, director, Empowerment Congress of Dona Ana County, presented on Project Jupiter, a proposed development in Santa Teresa featuring four data centers and a 700-megawatt natural gas power plant, which has been approved for industrial revenue bonds and other tax incentives. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=10/29/2025&ItemNumber=5>.

Recess and Tour of HF Sinclair Corporation Operations

The meeting recessed at 4:25 p.m. Committee members were given a tour of the HF Sinclair Corporation's pre-treatment renewable diesel facility and oil refinery in Artesia.

Thursday, October 30

Reconvene

The meeting reconvened at 8:34 a.m.

Oil and Gas Updates: Production, Price, Royalty Rates and Workforce Development (8:37 a.m.)

Mr. Shelton presented oil and gas production trends, the status of Class VI primacy rulemaking, budget needs for the Oil Conservation Division (OCD) of the EMNRD and the current balance and eligible uses of the Reclamation Fund, noting that the state may face over \$1 billion in reclamation liabilities. Sunalei Stewart, deputy commissioner of operations, SLO, gave an overview of Senate Bill 23 (2025), which provided for the first oil and gas royalty rate increase since the 1970s. He discussed lease trend data and gave estimates on the revenue impacts and long-term benefits of the royalty increase.

Tom Clifford, Ph.D., president, Clifford Consulting, LLC, discussed issues impacting New Mexico's oil and gas sector and reviewed the industry's role in New Mexico's economy. He stated that average wages in oil and gas are twice those of other industries and cautioned that major producers are reducing global workforces in response to falling prices.

Steve Saucedo, vice president for workforce development, New Mexico Junior College (NMJC), gave an overview of NMJC's programs that are designed to align with workforce needs in the region, including oil and gas technologies, commercial transportation and English for the workplace. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=10/29/2025&ItemNumber=6>.

Oil and Gas Act: Enforcement and Reform; Reclamation Fund Changes; and Plugging of Abandoned Wells (10:59 a.m.)

Sam Bradley, member, Board of Directors, National Stripper Well Association, and partner, Summit Oil and Gas, LLC, discussed his experience as a small operator of stripper wells and urged policymakers to assess whether New Mexico's regulatory landscape is business friendly, pointing to challenges he faced in Colorado with costly and burdensome regulation.

Mr. Shelton discussed legislative proposals aimed at modernizing the Oil and Gas Act, including strengthening enforcement tools, improving transparency and clarifying regulatory authority. He called attention to the need for data and technology enhancements and technical staffing to expand well plugging programs. Mr. Stewart outlined the SLO's efforts to improve enforcement of remediation and reclamation for operations on state trust lands, highlighting accountability, environmental stewardship and policy proposals. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=10/29/2025&ItemNumber=7>.

Reuse of Treated Produced Water: Technology, Current Rules and Proposed Revisions (12:44 p.m.)

Ms. Rader stated that the NMED is actively engaged in the regulatory process of treated produced water and supports a long-term approach to ensure human health and environmental protection across all levels of use. She said that the use of treated produced water is included in the state's 50-year strategic water action plan and viewed as one of several tools to support long-term water security.

Matthias Sayer, Water Access, Treatment and Reuse Alliance, discussed proposed Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) rules on the use of treated produced water, stressing the need for a public process with stakeholder input and regulatory structure that contemplates non-oilfield applications. Chad Unrau, vice president of reuse, Aris Water Solutions, outlined a comprehensive approach to treating and reusing produced water from oil and gas operations. He emphasized technological innovation, environmental safety and collaboration to enable beneficial reuse beyond the oilfield.

Sarah Knopp, policy specialist, Amigos Bravos, discussed concerns about the use of treated produced water, including trade-secret chemical compositions; scientific and regulatory gaps; and environmental impacts, and provided legislative recommendations that include mandating full disclosure of chemicals used in oil and gas operations. Daniel Timmons, senior attorney, Western Environmental Law Center, provided a comparison of current and proposed WQCC rules for produced water reuse. He highlighted regulatory gaps, urged stronger safeguards and called for precautionary approaches before allowing reuse outside of the oilfield. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=10/29/2025&ItemNumber=8>.

Growing the Fusion Energy Industry in New Mexico (3:19 p.m.)

Carrie von Muench, chief operating officer, Pacific Fusion; John Elling, Ph.D., founder and chief executive officer, Molten Salt Solutions; and David Ellmann, general partner, UP.Abundance, discussed New Mexico's potential and opportunity to become a hub for clean energy innovation and a national leader in the emerging fusion energy industry. The panel discussed the benefits and transformative potential of fusion and ways to support industry growth and workforce development through policy and public-private partnerships. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=WNR&Date=10/29/2025&ItemNumber=9>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 4:06 p.m.

Revised: November 18, 2025

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
SIXTH MEETING
of the
WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

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

Monday, November 17

- 9:15 a.m. **Call to Order and Introductions**
—Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics, Chair, Water and Natural Resources
Committee (WNRC)
—Representative Matthew McQueen, Vice Chair, WNRC
- 9:30 a.m. (1) **Climate Change Impacts and Proposed Legislation**
—Ali Rye, Secretary, Homeland Security and Emergency Management
Department
—Adrian Avila, Principal Fiscal Analyst, New Mexico Senate Majority
Office
—Senator Mimi Stewart
- 10:15 a.m. (2) **Community Solar Update and Public Regulation Commission (PRC)
Session Priorities**
—Cholla Khoury, Chief of Staff, PRC
—John Kreienkamp, Deputy Director, Legal Division, PRC
- 11:15 a.m. (3) **Solar: Industry Status, Options and Access**
—Rebecca Puck Stair, Director, Energy Conservation and Management
Division (ECAM), Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources
Department (EMNRD)
—Christian Casillas, Ph.D., Executive Director, Coalition of Sustainable
Communities New Mexico
—Jim DesJardins, Executive Director, Renewable Energy Industries
Association of New Mexico
- 12:15 p.m. **Public Comment***
- 12:30 p.m. **Lunch**

- 1:00 p.m. (4) [Community Energy Efficiency Development Projects Update](#)
—Rebecca Puck Stair, Director, ECAM, EMNRD
—Ann Simon, Deputy Director of Environmental Health, and Sustainability Officer, City of Albuquerque
- 2:00 p.m. (5) [Senate Memorial 2 \(2025\) Report: Wildfire Study Group](#)
—Ben Bajema, Policy Director, EMNRD
—Elisabeth Johnson, Associate General Counsel and Legislative Liaison, Office of Superintendent of Insurance
—Riaz Mohammed, Wildfire Regulatory Policy Specialist, Xcel Energy
- 3:00 p.m. (6) [Strategic Water Reserve Update and Office of the State Engineer \(OSE\) and Interstate Stream Commission \(ISC\) Session Priorities](#)
—Anjali Bean, Senior Policy Advisor, Western Resource Advocates
—Hannah Risely-White, Director, ISC
—Elizabeth Anderson, State Engineer, OSE
- 4:00 p.m. (7) [Aquifer Mapping Program and Water Data Act Updates](#)
—Stacy Timmons, Associate Director, Hydrogeology Programs, Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources (NMBGMR), New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology (NM Tech)
—Sean Connell, Ph.D., Senior Research Scientist, NMBGMR, NM Tech
—Rachel Hobbs, Water Data Program Manager, NMBGMR, NM Tech
- 5:00 p.m. **Recess**

Tuesday, November 18

- 8:30 a.m. (8) [Water and Natural Resources — Workforce Development Wrap-Up](#)
—Sarita Nair, Secretary, Workforce Solutions Department
—Xochitl Torres Small, Executive Director, Quivira Coalition
—Eli Cuna, Executive Director, The Semilla Project
- 9:30 a.m. (9) [Los Alamos National Laboratory Cleanup, Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances \(PFAS\) Updates and Department of Environment \(NMED\) Session Priorities](#)
—James Kenney, Secretary, NMED
—John S. Rhoderick, Deputy Secretary for Administration, NMED
- 10:30 a.m. (10) [PFAS: Health Impacts](#)
—Jean-Luc E. Cartron, M.D., Ph.D., Research Professor, Department of Biology, and Associate, Museum of Southwest Biology, University of New Mexico
—Wendy Johnson, M.D., M.P.H., Family Physician; Assistant Professor, Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of New Mexico

- 11:15 a.m. (11) [Senate Memorial 19 \(2025\) Report: New Mexico Meat, Cheese and Produce in Schools](#)
—Jason New, Director, Marketing and Development Division, New Mexico Department of Agriculture
—Michael Chavez, Director, Student Success and Wellness Bureau, Public Education Department
—Joe Madrid, Owner, U.S.A. Beef Packing, LLC
—Alena Paisano, Director, Approved Supplier Program, New Mexico Farmers' Marketing Association

12:15 p.m. **Lunch**

- 1:00 p.m. (12) [Funding Cuts: Impacts on Energy and the Environment](#)
—Austin Davidson, Fiscal Analyst, Legislative Finance Committee
—Edward Martinez, Ph.D., Deputy Director, Operations and Development, New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute
—Luis A. Reyes, Jr., Chief Executive Officer, Kit Carson Electric Cooperative
—Robert S. Balch, Ph.D., Director, Petroleum Recovery Research Center, NM Tech

Discussion of Proposed Legislation

- 2:00 p.m. (13) [Land Grant-Merced and Acequia Infrastructure Fund — .232274.4](#)
—Representative Miguel P. García
- 2:20 p.m. (14) [Green Amendment — .232673.1](#)
—Representative Joanne J. Ferrary
—Senator Shannon D. Pinto
- 2:40 p.m. (15) [Oil and Gas Reclamation Fund Changes — .232553.2](#)
—Representative Mark B. Murphy
- 3:00 p.m. (16) [ISC Funding — .232521.1](#)
—Senator Joshua A. Sanchez
—Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Stefanics

3:20 p.m. **Adjourn**

*Members of the public may make virtual public comments during the public comment period of the meeting by following the instructions under the "Additional Information" section of the WNRC [web page](#).

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>.

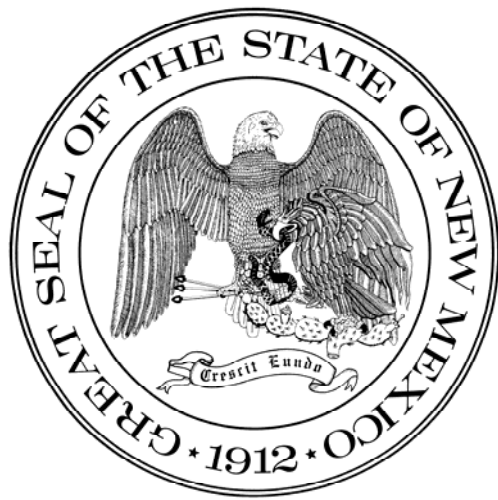
ISC Funding — .232521.1 (3:07 p.m.)

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.



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SERVICE
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO