

NEW MEXICO IS THE DRIEST IT HAS BEEN IN 1,000 YEARS

PROBLEM

New Mexico enters 2023 in a water crisis. But with unprecedented peril comes unprecedented opportunity.

Reservoirs are nearly empty, aquifers are declining, rivers are drying, irrigation ditches are empty when crops most need water, and our forests spent the summer of 2022 burning.

Many small communities lack the resources to manage the systems they have. State agencies lack the resources to carry out the jobs they already have been given, with little capacity to address the new challenges.

Driven by drought and climate change, New Mexico's water crisis has laid bare water policies and processes that users, practitioners, and lawmakers agree are not meeting the 21st century needs of New Mexicans under the stress of drought, aging infrastructure, and climate change.



Core Problems identified by the Task Force

1.

Water Supply

Coping with the reality of climate change impacts on our already overallocated rivers and aquifers

2.

State Government Capacity

State water agencies lack programs, technology, and resources to protect the public welfare of the state, helping New Mexico communities improve our resilience and equitably adapt to substantially less water

3.

Community Capacity

Massive wildfires, deep and lasting drought, and warming hammering communities that lack the resources to adapt

4.

Watersheds and Aquifers at Risk

Jeopardizes the health of our beloved forests, rivers, aquifers, and those of us who depend on their services

→ OPPORTUNITY

We enter 2023 with focused attention from state leaders, and an influx of state and federal funding. Those are the opportunities - the convergence of urgent need, growing political will, and unprecedented levels of state and federal funding to address needed water management reform and infrastructure investments. A window of opportunity is open before us.

RECOMMENDATIONS

IN BRIEF

Water Resources Management and Planning

- Transform, empower, and adequately fund the state's water management agencies to fully implement their mission in serving the citizens of New Mexico
- Elevate water planning, through statutory clarification of its purpose, proper funding and empowerment of regional and local water agencies, to set clearly identified goals for permanent and escalating reduction in water use over the coming decades
- Provide the necessary state funding needed to leverage the bounty of federal funding currently available for water infrastructure
- Support the resilience of the state's diverse agricultural communities with effective water rights administration by the Office of the State Engineer (OSE), inclusion of agricultural stakeholders in water management, and consideration of equity, conservation, and sustainability

In Conclusion...

In **2023**, New Mexico has the opportunity to take bold, transformational steps to ensure a sustainable water future.

To learn more visit:
<https://nmwater.org/>

Community Drinking Water, Wastewater and Stormwater Capacity, Infrastructure, and Finance

- Create a Water Infrastructure Projects Authority to assist small communities
- Support regional water system collaboration
- Enhance technical assistance support to small communities
- Create an emergency relief fund to help communities like those hit by fires and post-fire flooding in 2022
- Grow the water workforce

River, Aquifer, and Watershed Health

- Fully fund and staff the Strategic Water Reserve and the River Stewardship Program
- Fund New Mexico Environment Department to take over surface water quality regulation from the federal government
- Modernize forest management programs, both preventative and post-fire response.
- Review modifications to New Mexico groundwater law to enable New Mexico to increase resilience of the state's supply of groundwater to dependent users
- Protect groundwater reserves by collecting data and maintaining timely law modifications

THE WATER POLICY AND INFRASTRUCTURE TASK FORCE

To help address these issues, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham authorized the State Engineer to form a Water Policy and Infrastructure Task Force of water and natural resources experts, senior state agency staff, and stakeholders from around New Mexico to study the problems and recommend actions the state can take.

Working from June to November 2022, the 29 Water Task Force members, representing diverse expertise, geographies, and community interests, examined New Mexico water management and governance challenges. Task Force members reached broad consensus on a suite of transformative solutions to set the stage for foundational and lasting improvements as we prepare New Mexicans for a declining water resource.