

# TAOS REGIONAL WATER PLAN PUBLIC WELFARE STATEMENT

## Vision and Values

*Agua es Vida – Water is Life*

***Siete Partidas, Leys 3: “Las cosas que son de todas – son l’agre, sol, uvia, agua y el mar.”***

"The things which belong in common to all the living creatures of the world are the air, sun, rain, water, the sea, and its shores; for every living creature may use them according to his wants."

### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

Water is one of the most fundamental natural resources sustaining the communities and environment of the Taos Region.

The Taos Region is an area of unparalleled natural beauty and cultural wealth. The integrity of our surface water and groundwater resources is inextricably interwoven with the continued health of our natural environment and the viability of our traditional communities.

The traditional cultures of the Taos Region have revered water as the lifeblood of their communities. The Taos Region’s traditional communities established effective systems of community governance and management of water. These systems evolved to protect the long-term sustainability of local water resources, and they reflect the centrality of those water resources in maintaining the social fabric of local communities. Water was, and to some extent continues to be, viewed as a community resource, belonging to the community, for the people, for the land, for the animals. From our earliest communities subsequent inhabitants of the Taos Region have inherited this ethic of respecting our local natural resource base and of cultivating truly sustainable communities by living within the limits of our natural water supply.

Thus, the Taos Region has a long history of managing water as a shared community resource and living within the means of the local naturally occurring water supply, while providing good quality water for domestic, agricultural, municipal, and industrial uses and preserving healthy watershed conditions and wildlife habitat to a high degree. This tradition of managing water in a manner that is harmonious with nature and designed to sustain the long-term viability of local communities represents a central element of the Taos Region’s heritage. This tradition stands alongside the more recent legal practice of treating the right to use water beneficially as a private property right that came into play following the United States’ conquest of New Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century.

Today this backdrop of traditional wisdom offers valuable guidance for the governance of water resources in the Region and the State.

Notwithstanding the wisdom of historical water management in the Taos Region, the Region’s residents are concerned that growth pressures from outside and within the Taos Region could create problems in terms of diminished surface water flows, lowered water tables, and/or degraded water quality.

To the extent that it is consistent with their authority, all local governmental entities and political subdivisions in the Taos Region should seek to maximize the Public Welfare in water by adopting and enforcing land use, zoning, and other local measures that tend to

prevent the creation of additional problems with surface and ground water resources in the Region.

This Public Welfare Statement is intended to be a living document that reflects the wishes of the public in the Taos Region. Further, it is intended to be reviewed and revised as changing circumstances warrant.

## **II. DEFINITION OF THE PUBLIC WELFARE:**

### **A. Scope:**

The following criteria, which define the Public Welfare within the Taos Region, should be considered by the State Engineer in assessing whether granting an application is detrimental to the Public Welfare of the state, or is contrary to conservation of water within the state.

### **B. Individual Criteria of the Public Welfare:**

#### **1. Cultural Protection:**

The residents of the Taos Region's multicultural communities have always had a deep cultural and spiritual connection with the local waters around which their communities were first organized and in relation to which these communities have developed their distinctive social and cultural fabric.

Our cultural heritage is one of the Taos Region's and the State's greatest assets. The diversity and mutual enrichment of the Region's Native American, Hispanic, and other cultures have been nurtured over centuries and millennia by the Region's scarce water resources.

The Taos Region's cultural wealth and diversity, especially its acequia-based communities, have made it a magnet for people from around the United States and the world. As such, they are an essential component of the Region's and State's economic and social vitality. Thus, the Region's communities recognize the importance of protecting their water resources.

In order to sustain and enhance this cultural wealth, local water resources must be maintained in terms of local water quality and available water supply sufficient to support the local communities and enable them to grow over the long term.

#### **2. Agrarian Character:**

The traditional agrarian character of the Region's land and communities continues to be a vital part of the Taos Region's social and cultural fabric. Traditional land based communities keep water connected to the land and within the local watershed. Subsistence and pastoral agriculture have provided local sustainability for many years. Small scale farming and ranching continue to be a vital part of the local culture and economy, providing income and sustenance for many residents of the Region. Local agriculture provides food security for some of the most impoverished communities in the region.

In order to maintain this local agrarian character, residents of the Region have a strong policy preference for maintaining the connection between land and water for agricultural uses. Acequias have existed in the Taos Region for hundreds of years; they are part of the historical environment, and contribute to its local sustainability.

### **3. Ecological Health: Vitality of Watersheds and Ecosystems:**

The natural environment of the Taos Region, particularly the health of the Region's watersheds, is central to the physical, cultural, and spiritual health of local residents.

The watersheds of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains are the primary source of water for the Taos Water Planning Region. As such, they are the underpinning of the diversity of living things and the quality of the environment in the Taos Region and neighboring regions. The residents of the Taos Region have repeatedly affirmed that protecting and enhancing the long-term health and sustainability of these watersheds and the ecosystems they support is essential to the Public Welfare of the region.

In addition, the health of the Region's watersheds and aquifers allows them to perform vital ecological services that sustain the human communities as well as the flora and fauna of the Region. Vital ecological services provided by our healthy watersheds include: a clean and sustainable water supply; flood, drought and fire mitigation; ecosystem maintenance; and the provision of wildlife and fish habitat. Acequias also are a vital part of the Taos Region's landscape and watersheds that contribute to the Region's ecological health.

### **4. Long-Term Community and Economic Development Potential:**

The Taos Region has grown rapidly over the past few decades and clearly is on a path towards continued growth, in terms of both residential and commercial development. The protection and development of sustainable local water supplies through comprehensive water resource planning to support the Region's likely long-term growth and economic development, including increased residential, commercial, municipal, and industrial use, is essential to the Region's continued vitality.

### **5. Recreational Tourism:**

The stunning beauty of the Taos Region has long played a major role in the physical, cultural, and spiritual life of people residing in the Region's communities, and in making the Taos Region a destination for tourists. Recreational tourism that depends on adequate quantities and quality of water is a major, growing component of the Region's economy. Visitors from around the United States and the world flock to the Taos Region for such outdoor pursuits as skiing, snowshoeing, whitewater rafting, kayaking, fishing, birding, hiking, and hunting.

The Region's continued ability to attract and support these activities is vital to ensuring that the Region has an economically and socially healthy future. These recreational opportunities are directly dependent on the protection of our local waters, both in terms of quality and quantity.

### **6. Public Information and Educational Outreach:**

The water resources of the Taos Region bind the individual communities within the Region together and sustain them all. The viability of all communities in the Region depends on our limited, interconnected local waters.

The ability of local communities within the Taos Region to gather, share, and analyze geologic, hydrologic and water rights information on which they depend is critical to our communities' ability to use and protect those waters effectively. Thus, the gathering and dissemination of high quality information about the capacity and condition of local water resources within the Region would significantly enhance the Public Welfare of the Region.

To achieve that goal, local and state entities are encouraged to work together to obtain, share and disseminate comprehensive reproducible data concerning all water resources in the Taos Region.

## **7. Conservation:**

The Taos Region recognizes that water is a precious and limited resource. The Taos Region realizes that in a fully appropriated system that water conservation and reuse may be one of the few alternative sources of supply.

It is imperative that we conserve the resource by implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs), to reduce water waste. Furthermore, the Taos Region acknowledges the importance of conservation when managing and administering water supplies.

## **8. Water Supply Management:**

The Taos Region acknowledges that water supply management depends on conservation while maintaining a sustainable balance between recharge to aquifers, available supplies and groundwater withdrawals.

The Taos Region recognizes the importance of sustainable surface water supply management. Maintaining streams and watercourses is important to the region, as well as downstream users. Likewise, maintaining and restoring watersheds is important to sustaining community water supplies.

Because of the interconnection between streams and their underlying aquifers, the Taos Region supports comprehensive monitoring and managing of both surface and ground water to maintain the balance of uses from both sources (conjunctive management).

To enhance its water supply management, the Taos Region continues to support hydrologic studies, aquifer mapping, and a comprehensive system of monitoring and measurement.

## **9. Minimizing Water Contamination:**

The contamination of surface water and groundwater resources has been documented and is a matter of considerable concern in the Taos Region.

Higher water quality in the Region promotes health, safety and the public welfare. Improvements to water quality in the Region will promote the Public Welfare.