

DRAFT
Public Participation Plan

New Mexico
Statewide Policy and Strategic Plan for
Non-Native Phreatophyte/Watershed Management

Prepared by Tamarisk Coalition

Stakeholder involvement is crucial to the successful implementation of the New Mexico Statewide Policy and Strategic Plan for Non-Native Phreatophyte/Watershed Management. Public involvement will provide valuable information and insight into how this plan is viewed by the various stakeholders. This Public Participation Plan (PPP) identifies a number of methods to inform and educate the public about the Plan by focusing on four objectives: 1) identifying the problem; 2) why the problem is important; 3) what is being done to solve the problem; and 4) how the public can help.

Public participation, however, should not begin and end with making comments on the Strategic Plan. It should extend through all phases of implementation, revegetation, monitoring, and long-term maintenance. This will allow program managers to maintain support for the program and make adjustments to the Strategic Plan as new information becomes available.

This PPP is sectioned into four areas that include: 1) what actions have occurred to date, 2) what actions are important to gain and maintain support for the Strategic Plan 3) what can be done to ensure Tribal involvement and input, and 4) identification of a partial list of organizations that may have interest in the non-native phreatophyte problem.

This PPP is not an absolute approach but rather it should be viewed in the context of adaptive management; i.e., as new information is gained, the PPP will be adjusted to improve the program.

Public Participation that has already occurred on the Strategic Plan

Activities that have taken place which were intended to gain public involvement include:

- A. Since its inception in April 2004, the HB-2 Work Group has conducted open public meetings in order to obtain public input in the development of the Strategic Plan. These meetings were attended principally by representatives of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), several environmental organizations, university representatives, federal agencies, a few Tribal representatives, and other state agencies.
- B. Interviews were conducted by the Tamarisk Coalition in order to identify positions, recommendations, issues, concerns, progress, etc. on the existing non-native phreatophyte program and what specific areas the Strategic Plan should address. To assure these inputs were open and candid; all interviews were held in confidence. Individual HB-2

Work Group members, state agencies, the Governor's office, Tribal interests, SWCDs, federal land management agencies, environmental organizations, and private landowners were interviewed. These interviews centered on the following questions:

1. What has been really good about the existing program?
 2. How would you improve the program based on lessons learned?
 3. What is the process for determining the success of actions taken?
 4. What do you see as the role of SWCDs?
 5. What kind of additional support would be valuable?
 6. What do you see as important components of the Strategic Plan?
- C. HB-2 Work Group members provided briefings to Legislature members, the Governor's office, and department Secretaries of respective HB-2 Work Group members.
- D. Specific subcommittees were established to develop the templates and protocols for control, monitoring, revegetation and rehabilitation, and long-term maintenance and management. This process incorporated a wide range of involvement and review in order to reach consensus on acceptable approaches.
- E. The New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts representatives provided information on the development of the Strategic Plan to New Mexico's 47 SWCDs.

Proposed Public Participation actions for the Strategic Plan

The following actions are proposed for developing an informed consensus on the finalized Strategic Plan.

- A. **Website** – The use of the internet is now one of the most accessible means of involving stakeholders. The current website for NMDA can be used as the principle venue for conveying information to the public electronically about the Strategic Plan. Links from the other HB-2 Work Group member agencies would access this site. The website would provide links to download the Strategic Plan and supporting documents. Through an interactive format comments on the Plan can be recorded electronically with a follow-up message acknowledging that the comment has been received. The website would also be used to update members of the public about upcoming public meetings, presentations, etc. associated with the Strategic Plan.
- B. **Comment period announcement** – Once the website is established, a public notice should be distributed to the local newspapers through a press release indicating the availability of the Strategic Plan for comment with reference to the website for more information. A minimum of 30 days should be identified for comments to be received, unless stipulated otherwise by State statute. This advisement should also be sent out by mail and/or e-mail to potentially affected interests which include State, federal, Tribal, and local governments/agencies, New Mexico attendees at the Team Tamarisk

conference, SWCDs, non-government organizations, and individuals who have been involved on this issue.

C. **Educational materials** – Before soliciting comments from the public on the Strategic Plan it is important to note that New Mexico is a state with a culturally rich and diverse population. Busy people with busy lives have only so much time and experience to review potentially large and technical documents. Thus, information about this Plan should be as “user-friendly” as possible with explanations used to describe terms which may be unfamiliar to the general public (e.g., what does the term “phreatophyte” mean?). Two relatively simple educational tools which can be used for different public participation activities include:

1. **Brochure** A four-fold (11” x 14” format) brochure could be developed that would provide key information on the problem (including pictures), why it’s important to solve, what the State’s strategy is, and the process for involvement. It would also include contact information and the website address. It is recommended that a limited number of brochures be printed in Spanish for Spanish-speaking members of communities. This brochure should be written so that its usefulness will extend beyond the comment period for the Strategic Plan. These brochures would be part of any mailing used during the comment period.
2. **Photo Journal** Another simple tool for education would be a series of photographs illustrating the problem, control techniques used in New Mexico, in-progress activities, and post-control results. These could be placed on the NMDA website, be used on a display board for meetings, etc.

D. **Public input** – A series of at least three public meetings is recommended to describe the key elements of the Strategic Plan and to receive any additional public comments. Comments will be summarized into categories with appropriate responses which can be used in the future to update the Strategic Plan.

Future Public Participation Activities

Continued support for the non-native phreatophyte program will require continued public participation and support. Some of these activities are intertwined in the everyday conduct of the program and are already being performed by NMDA and the SWCDs, while others require additional effort. Several are described within the components of the Templates and Protocols. The lead for these efforts would be NMDA and the SWCDs who have a unique capability to reach out to members of communities, Tribes, non-profit organizations, landowners, and other groups in implementing the Strategic Plan. Specific activities might include the following:

- A. NMDA will maintain a comprehensive list of all the people, organizations, agencies, etc. who have expressed interest in the non-native phreatophyte problem.

- B. Local meetings with Tribal governments, communities, and landowners could be held prior to the implementation of projects to describe the proposed approach to be used for control, revegetation, and long-term maintenance. These informational meetings also could be used to solicit input for improving cooperation, outcomes, etc.
- C. Depending on the complexity of the control program and the needs of the local community, monthly or quarterly progress reports could be made to local community leaders (e.g., Tribal governments, city council, county commissioners).
- D. The following organizations and individuals can be kept apprised of proposed and on-going projects.
- Civic forums (e.g. Kiwanis Club)
 - Non-governmental organizations (e.g., Sierra Club, Cattleman's Association)
 - Schools
 - Legislature
 - Congressional delegates
- E. Public tours of sites could be conducted before, during, and after control and revegetation efforts.
- F. The public must be kept fully informed of any problems that arise and on the resolution of these problems.
- G. Certain types of media can be inexpensive and effective in relaying information to the public. These include interviews with newspapers and public radio stations such as KUNM in Albuquerque. Some community-based newspapers provide information exclusively about water issues, such as the *Jicarita News*, dedicated to preservation and protection of the Jicarita watershed. Spokesman for these can include NMDA and SWCD representatives and university researchers working on solving the problem.
- H. NMDA and the SWCDs could develop an annual newsletter that would be e-mailed to the list of contacts being maintained.
- I. NMDA in cooperation with the SWCC could summarize the annual monitoring studies that are completed on the control, revegetation, and maintenance activities.
- J. State universities performing research could summarize their efforts and findings in an annual report.
- K. NMDA should provide periodic reports to the Legislature, Governor's office, other State agencies, federal agencies, and Tribal governments who have interest in this problem.
- L. The Association of New Mexico Conservation Districts can continue to provide its members, on an annual basis, an update on the program's progress.

M. NMDA and the SWCC may want to have a booth at the New Mexico State Fair to showcase the program.

This list is intended to provide general direction on some public outreach approaches that might be appropriate. All of these items may or may not be accomplished and others may be augmented based on experience as the program matures.

New Mexico Tribal Involvement and Input

Tribal participation is essential to the successful implementation of the Strategic Plan. Under the Governor's *Statement of Policy and Process* with the All Indian Pueblo Council, the State of New Mexico "recognizes and respects the sovereignty of each nation while recognizing the "importance of full and open communication and cooperation on issues of shared interest and concern and requires an open-door policy for Pueblos to voice concerns and discuss issues and to have the Pueblos' views seriously considered with respect to the formulation and execution of State policy."

Additionally, the *Statement of Policy and Process* states the Governor and Pueblos "agree to establish procedures setting forth the framework to coordinate a cooperative and joint effort to address issues identified by the Governor and Pueblos, to seek mutually beneficial solutions and outcomes, and to avoid litigation." The Navajo Nation, the Mescalero Apache, and other Tribes have similar agreements with the Governor and the State of New Mexico that will be honored to the fullest extent.

Due to the Tribes' Government to Government relationship with the State of New Mexico and as sovereign nations under the federal government, individual members of Tribes will not be actively solicited for comments on the Strategic Plan. Rather, comments and communication concerning the Strategic Plan will be directed to Tribal leaders. However, individual members of Tribes will be welcome to submit comments on the Strategic Plan if they so desire.

A certified copy of the Strategic Plan will be sent to each Tribal Leader (Governor or President) with a letter inviting Tribes to participate in submitting comments on it. A second copy of the Strategic Plan will be sent to the Director of Natural Resources for each Tribe stating that a certified copy of the Plan has been sent to the President or Governor of each Tribe.

Non-governmental Organizations who may have interest in the Non-native Phreatophyte Problem

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can play a unique and important role in Strategic Plan in terms of their organization's particular interests and how these interests relate to the Plan. Many public interest groups have provided information and education to the public on the same or related issues, and worked to shape public policy on environmental issues at both the state and federal levels. Many groups have honed their outreach skills through list-serves, newsletters,

websites, organizational meetings, and “word-of-mouth” resulting in large member bases comprised of interested and active members of the public.

Listed below is a partial list of NGO’s, in alphabetically order, that engage in issues related to the Strategic Plan. Information that is distributed to the general public and specific activities identified to provide information and education should include these organizations. This list will be expanded to include other groups that express interest, are known by the HB-2 Work Group such as major irrigation and other water users, or are suggested by others as important to include.

Acequia Madre de San Antonio Community Ditch Association

Amigos Bravos - Friends of the Wild Rivers

Association of Dude Ranchers (regional)

Audubon Society (Central New Mexico Audubon Society; Southwestern Audubon Society, Southeastern Audubon Society; Mesilla Valley Audubon Society; Sangre de Cristo Audubon Society)

Bosque Preparatory School

Carrizo Valley Watershed Group

Carlsbad Irrigation District

Cedar Hill Clean Water Coalition

Center for Biological Diversity, Pinos Altos, NM

Chaves County Flood Commission

City of ABQ Open Space Division

Coalition of Arizona/New Mexico Counties for Stable Economic Growth, Glenwood, NM

Committee to Save the Rio Hondo

Culebra Coalition

Earth Works Institute, Galisteo Watershed Restoration Project

Endangered Species Act Coalition (Catron County Concerned Citizens; New Mexico Public Lands Council; New Mexico Woolgrowers Action Committee; New Mexico Woolgrowers Association; Northern Catron County Ranchers)

Environmental Defense

Farm Connection, Dixon, NM

Forest Guardians

League of Conservation Voters, Albuquerque

New Mexico Citizens for Clean Air and Water

New Mexico Audubon Council (Mesilla Valley Audubon; Southwestern Audubon; Sangre de Cristo Audubon; Central NM Audubon; Lincoln County Bird Club; Farmington Bird Club; Chihuahan Desert Conservation Alliance.

New Mexico Cattlegrowers Association

Native Forest Network, Albuquerque

New Farms, Manuelitas, NM

New Mexico Acequia Association

New Mexico Goat Farms (Cuesta; MiVida De Oro; Purple Sage II & S Bar H; R Goats/Rocking R Goat Ranch; Showdown Dairy Goats; Twilight Farms)

New Mexico Meat Goat Association, Torreon

New Mexico Nature Conservancy

New Mexico Riparian Council

New Mexico Water Dialogue Group, Santa Fe

New Mexico Water Dialogue

New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, Albuquerque

Open Space Alliance

Pajarito Plateau Watershed Partnership

Quivira Coalition

Rio Grande Community Development Corporation, South Valley

Rio Grande Restoration (currently participating)

Rio Puerco Management Committee

Ruidoso River Association, Inc.

San Juan Water Users Association

Santa Fe Watershed Association

Sierra Club (*Northern New Mexico Chapter; Rio Grande Chapter; Pajarito Chapter; National Sierra Club)

**Southwest Consortium for Environmental Research (national)
Southwest Environmental Center**

Southwest Organizing Project, Albuquerque

Southwest Research and Information Center, Albuquerque

Student Ecology Research Program

TAOS Action Coalition, Taos

Tewa Women United (regional)

Tularosa Basin Water Resources Committee

Upper Gila Watershed Alliance

Watershed Watch

World Wildlife Fund