

Top 10 news stories for 2012

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This issue of the Taos News summarized a number of issues which were addressed during 2012. We are excerpting those of interest to planners.

Taos Pueblo Water Rights/Abeyta pact

After more than 50 years of fighting and 23 years of bargaining, the pieces of the Taos Valley's grand water settlement began to fall into place this year.

The deal — hashed out by Taos Pueblo, the town of Taos, acequia users and a number of domestic water providers — is meant to resolve disputes over who has a right to how much water, now and in the future.

The final agreement included a number of creative solutions. New wells will be dug and water will be pumped over-ground for miles. In some cases, water from Taos' rivers will be pumped underground to be used at other times of the year.

All told, the settlement will cost taxpayers around \$150 million, mostly from the federal government.

The payoffs for the agreement are supposed to be many: First and foremost, everyone in the deal feels more assured that they will have enough water, even if growth continues. Second, there are hopes that the bargain will improve relations among neighbors by allowing water adversaries to bury the hatchet following decades of dispute.

The pact is no doubt a major accomplishment in complex negotiation. There are naysayers who worry about the unforeseen consequences of shuffling water rights from above ground to underground, as well as up and down the Rio Grande.

While a few minor details remain unresolved, water transfers are already taking shape and the settlement parties have inked several contracts solidifying the deal. Over the next several years, the infrastructure of the Abeyta will be put in place and we will find out if things will go as smoothly as hoped, bringing (in the words of Taos Pueblo) "peace in the valley."

—J.R. Logan