



# THE TAOS NEWS

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**My Turn**

## **On the Abeyta Water Settlement**

**Tom Blankenhorn**

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The Abeyta Water Settlement allocates the amount of water available to each of the parties to that settlement.

The parties include over 60 major water rights stakeholders within Taos County, including Acequia Associations, Mutual Domestics, Water and Sanitation Districts, the Pueblo and the town of Taos. After decades of dispute, none of the parties are completely satisfied with the agreement, but all of them stand strongly behind it, as do the Office of the State Engineer, and the State and Federal Governments, which have promised to fund its implementation.

In order for the parties to use their allocations under the Abeyta Settlement, the paper transfer of water rights from some properties to others must be approved. This does not require physically transporting any water.

All paper transfers of water rights raise legitimate concerns about how such transfers affect traditional water uses. Each of them has to be considered on their own merits and I support the work of the Taos County Advisory Board which keeps the county informed about all transfer applications. But I have disagreed with their assessment of the first two applications for transfers under the Abeyta Settlement, which seek to transfer water rights from north of Questa into the El Prado Water and Sanitation District and the Arroyo Seco Acequia.

The area north of Questa has an abundance of water rights. These water rights give landowners the right to tap the aquifer for the purpose of commercial agricultural irrigation.

Very few of those landowners have used those water rights for many years.

As a result, many of those water rights have been for sale for many years. A large chunk of them were purchased by Santa Fe. Taos County Commissioners are unanimous in their opposition to transfers of water rights outside of Taos County because such transfers endanger the availability of those rights for our own citizens.

One of the current proposed transfers from the area north of Questa would benefit the El Prado Water and Sanitation District.

El Prado needs those rights to satisfy its current deficit with the State Engineer, and without them, they are in danger of eventually having to cut those services.

The El Prado Water and Sanitation District replaces individual wells and septic systems in a high water area with a centralized system that uses the deep aquifer as its source.

This system clearly benefits the water quality of El Prado by eliminating hundreds of individual wells and septic systems, and it clearly benefits those hundreds of families that are hooked up to the system.

The proposed transfer has no effect upon the Questa Acequia, and it actually could benefit the wells in that area.

If all of the water rights north of Questa were used to grow corn or soy, it is very likely that nearby wells would be affected.

I do not take these issues lightly. I have read extensively and talked for many hours with reasonable and well informed people on many sides of these issues, and I look forward to doing so in the future.

*Tom Blankenhorn is a Taos County commissioner of District IV.*