



THE TAOS NEWS

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Water rights, deep wells

Staff report

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El Prado Water and Sanitation District Clerk and Water Operator Marissa Romero checked the levels in water storage tanks in mid-May during her night shift, turning on the valve that temporarily redirected water from an El Prado's well to Taos's water supply. Both El Prado and the town of Taos are parties to the Abeyta Water Rights settlement.

The Abeyta Water Rights settlement was years in the making, but 2019 looks to be the year that some ideas written into the massive court negotiation are finally tested in the real world.

Most prominently on the landscape is a deep-aquifer water well that is in the works. The El Prado water district began drilling an exploratory water well on the mesa on U.S. 64 west in May 2018. The first attempt at drilling that well was unsuccessful because it produced too much sand. The district moved up the road a couple miles and are now trying for a second time. If the well ultimately provides water, El Prado will request the well be used to supply the community water system.

In September, the town accepted \$2,830,201 from the federal Bureau of Reclamation for its own wells. The town's planning phase, including exploratory water drilling, could last around 18 months. But some in the community are organizing opposition to elements of the Abeyta settlement. A coalition of residents mounted a protest and prayer action in December. They are calling for an assessment of the cultural impact of the settlement.

Others say mitigation wells will be too expensive to operate and produce lower quality water.

The Abeyta settlement is a water-rights agreement among Taos Pueblo, Taos Valley Acequia Association, the town and mutual domestic water groups.