ROOTED IN RESILIENCE: SECURING OUR RURAL WATER FUTURE

6th Annual Rural Water Summit
Wednesday, September 9, 2026
8:00am – 4:00pm

McKinley County Courthouse Extension, Conference Room
207 West Hill Avenue, Gallup, New Mexico 87301

AGENDA

TIME	SESSION
8:00 am – 8:15 am	**WELCOME AND OPENING ADDRESS** Commissioner Robert B. Baca, Chair, District III (McKinley County) Commissioner Baca serves as District III Commissioner and Chairperson for McKinley County, manages local governance and project priorities, and supports the county's water regionalization efforts in creating a regional utility authority and building system resiliency.
8:15 am – 9:00 am	**KEYNOTE ADDRESS** **From Infrastructure Needs to Regional Funding Solutions: Building Resilient Communities Region by Region** Donnie Quintana, Managing Director, Project Oversight (New Mexico Finance Authority) Overview on what small water system resiliency looks like, what it means for the northwest region, and how state agencies can help support infrastructure planning, project readiness, technical assistance, and funding.
9:00 am – 10:30 am	**BUILDING WATER SYSTEM RESILIENCY** **Implementing Strategies – How to Use an Asset Management Plan** Veronica Castro, Utility Manager (El Valle Water Alliance) Implementing an asset management plan (AMP) requires moving from strategy to daily execution by assessing current organizational structures, setting clear goals, prioritizing critical assets based on risk and service levels, executing a structured action plan, and monitoring performance outcomes over time. (9:00am – 9:30am) **Senate Bill 1 – Understanding Regionalization and Resiliency** Blanca Surgeon, Rural Development Specialist, (Rural Communities Assistance Corporation) and Veronica Castro, Utility Manager (El Valle Water Alliance) Overview and updates on water regionalization and resiliency process, under Senate Bill 1 (SB1) Small Systems Resiliency Act that passed in 2023, including systems reorganizing under SB1, status and opportunities. (9:30am – 10:30am)

10:30 am – 12:00 pm **BUILDING WATER RESILIENCE IN NORTHWEST NEW MEXICO**

Prioritizing Water Regionalization and Building Resilience

Angelina Grey, Planner/RWPDO Program Manager (Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments)

Comprehensive overview of the McKinley County water regionalization initiative, collaborating and building partnerships with agencies, WIIN to TAP. (10:30am – 11:00am)

How We Got Here and Where We're Going — SB1 Regionalization of the Utility Authority

Jason Sanchez, Former Director (Northwest New Mexico Utility Authority) and Blanca Surgeon (Rural Communities Assistance Corporation)

Overview of the challenges of the Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) and transitioning to the Utility Authority under SB1, merger plan overview, and what this means for the region (services to be offered). (11:00am – 11:30am)

Building Resilience: Water System Projects and Progress

Angelina Grey, Planner/RWPDO Program Manager (Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments)

Small water systems face critical hurdles in technical, financial, and managerial (TFM) capacities, regulatory compliance, aging infrastructure, and funding constraints. Upgrades and improvements rely heavily on local support and state and federal programs. *Projecteering* is generating positive impacts for small systems by taking 'shelved projects' to 'shove-ready' status. (11:30am – 12:00pm)

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm **LUNCH KEYNOTE**

Building Water Resiliency

Kelsey Rader, Deputy Director (New Mexico Environment Department, Drinking Water Bureau)

Overview of the New Mexico Environment Department's goals for water system resiliency including the Governors 50-Year Water Action Plan, tracking progress, NMED's Regionalization and direct assistance support and how various state funding opportunities can contribute to water systems building their own water resiliency moving forward.

1:00 pm – 1:45 pm **INTEGRATING RESILIENCE WITH REGIONAL WATER PLANNING**

Regional Water Planning Overview and Updates

Anne Ruthstrom, Senior Water Planner (Office of the State Engineer, Interstate Stream Commission)

Overview of ISC regional water planning; creating regional councils, timeline and scheduling for northwest NM, recommendations on how to start preparing the region to update the Northwest Region Water Plan.

1:45 pm – 3:45 pm	**INTEGRATING TURNKEY SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVING SYSTEM RESILIENCY** **Water System Resiliency Assessment: Hands-On Workshop** Anders Lundahl, Sustainable System Specialist, and Melanie Delgado, Regional Planning Specialist, (New Mexico Environment Department, Drinking Water Bureau) Overview of the concept of "Resiliency" and how the Drinking Water Bureau's Regional Resiliency Team is bringing small water systems together to find regional solutions to local problems with a focus on actively filling out the new Resiliency Assessment so water systems can better understand what level of resiliency they currently have and understand options for building greater resiliency moving forward. (1:45 pm – 2:45pm) **Resilience Planning with WaterTAP** Anne Ruthstrom, Senior Water Planner (Office of the State Engineer, Interstate Stream Commission) Managing a public water system means balancing urgent needs like repairs and operations with bigger questions about long-term reliability and funding can take real time. The New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (NMISC) recently launched the WaterTAP program that is a free, web-based planning tool to help water system managers find resources, fix vulnerabilities, and plan for a more reliable water future. (2:45 pm – 3:45pm)
3:45 pm – 4:00 pm	**CLOSING REMARKS AND ADJOURN** Angelina Grey, Planner/RWPDO Program Manager (Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments)