

Why New Mexico's Regional Water Planning Guidelines Fall Short

New Mexico passed the Water Security Planning Act in 2023 to empower regional communities to plan for water scarcity. Unfortunately, the Interstate Stream Commission's draft guidelines, released before completion, weaken local control and underfund planning.

Take Action:

[Submit public comments](#) to the New Mexico ISC by **August 31**, demanding adequate funding, local decision-making authority, and robust regional water planning. Learn more at **NMWaterAdvocates.org**.

Here are seven major flaws in the proposed guidelines:

- 1. Takes Control Away from Local Communities** (*Page 3, C.1–C.2 & Page 4, D.1*)
The guidelines allow state agency staff to direct and override decisions that belong in the hands of local Regional Water Planning Councils. True adaptability for water security must come from the ground up, not top-down state control.
- 2. Rushes Planning & Leaves High-Risk Regions Behind** (*Page 4 Graphic*)
The proposed two-year timeline for regional planning is far too short to build a durable plan and solutions for complex water scarcity. Worse, it delays critical, high-risk regions—especially the Middle Rio Grande—by several years while the water crises in these populated areas escalate.
- 3. Lacks Dedicated Project Leadership** (*Pages 4–7, D.1*)
Complex regional water plans require experienced project managers. The guidelines fail to require or fund dedicated project leaders to leverage hydrologic expertise and build consensus among diverse stakeholders.
- 4. Ignores Critical Data Gaps** (*Page 8, 2.Step 1.a*)
If the "best available science" is outdated or missing regional water data, the guidelines offer no pathway or mandate to gather the necessary hydrologic data before making long-term water planning decisions.
- 5. No Accountability for Real Solutions** (*Page 11, 3.Step 2.c*)
When regions select projects, policies, and programs (PPPs), there is no required mechanism to measure whether those actions will meet their needs or mitigate the deficit.

6. **Woefully Underfunded Budgets** (*Page 17, E.1.a*)
The guidelines cap regional planning grants at just \$50,000 per region—nowhere near enough to hire technical experts, build consensus among diverse stakeholders, conduct meaningful public outreach, or draft legally sound water plans.
7. **Places an untenable workload too few ISC water planning staff.** The rules and guidelines set out over 60 significant tasks for ISC staff. These could become bottlenecks that will prevent completion of a complex regional water resilience plan in two years.

What We Need Instead:

1. **True Local Authority:** Regional Councils must manage their own planning decisions.
2. **Realistic Timeframes & Funding:** Multi-year support, prioritization of regions, and adequate state grants.
3. **Sound Science & Measurable Outcomes:** Current data and rigorous methodology that projects clear outcomes before approving regional plans..

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Thank you!