

Stay tuned on Aguslin Plains

John Larson's excellent article in the July 24 issue of El Defensor Chieftain brought us up to speed about developments in the attempted water grab in the Plains of San Augustin basin. I am commenting here to emphasize that there are important judicial decisions soon to be made in this matter.

As John Larson outlined, the Augustin Plains Ranch LLC has submitted a "new" application close upon the scheduling of a judicial hearing on their "old" application. Confusing? That's the point.

Is the old AP Ranch application now moot? No, but the Ranch LLC would like you to believe it is. Is the "new" application a revision of the "old" application? No, the two are completely separate applications, but with very similar content. Can we now ignore the "old" application and concentrate on the "new"? No. The old application must be finally denied if anything at all is to be settled. Does the new application supplant the new old? No, not at all. The state engineer has not yet decided to consider the application.

Keeping up with the multipronged efforts of this corporation can be difficult and somewhat confusing. As stated by Mr. Jichlinski, AP Ranch representative: "It (the new application) was developed following many months of meetings with people across the state who have an interest in developing new sources of water for New Mexico, including water policy experts and leaders, elected officials, scientists and hydrologists, and more."

This actually points out key weaknesses of both the "old" and the "new" application. Their claims are not backed by science. Meeting with lots of experts and policy makers may lend an air of credibility to the project, but those meetings have yet to yield a shred of evidence that the claims central to their project have any basis in reality. To the contrary, the little information so far available indicates that their claims are pie in the sky.

In spite of the AP Ranch's efforts to divert the wave of opposition to their original application, the judicial hearing on their appeal of the state engineers rejection of the "old" application is still on schedule and still important.

The reader is asked not to forget the hearing of oral arguments which is scheduled for 10 a.m. Aug. 21 at the Albuquerque Court of Appeals, 2211 Tucker NE in Albuquerque. Please stay tuned for any possible change in time or place.

Carol Pittman

Datil