

*David Coss was elected Mayor of Santa Fe in 2006. Among the Mayor's priorities is protecting Santa Fe's water and environment. This includes continuing to work with Santa Fe County to make the Buckman water project a reality, implementing smart growth policies that link water and growth, further developing water conservation initiatives, supporting local conservation design businesses, adopting aggressive green building standards, promoting alternative transportation, and supporting the Kyoto Protocols regarding climate change. Additionally, the Santa Fe River, which has shaped the region's history and drawn various cultures to reside here, is currently in a state of disrepair. David will continue to work to create a healthy Santa Fe River watershed connected by systems of trails and parks throughout the entire city. David grew up in Santa Fe and holds a B.S. in wildlife science from New Mexico State University and an M.S. degree in zoology from Southern Illinois University. After completing his master's degree, David worked as a surface water scientist for the State of New Mexico. During this time, he became active in his union and worked to create the New Mexico Environment Department and became director of the Environmental Protection Division within NMED. In 1995, David became Director of Public Works for the City of Santa Fe, where his dedication to restoring the Santa Fe River formalized. During that time, he was instrumental*



*in creating the Santa Fe River Masterplan and worked on the river restoration between St. Francis Drive and Camino Alire. After working as city manager in 1996, David completed his public service career at the State Land Office where he continued his work in environmental protection and natural resource management.*

## **WELCOMING REMARKS**

Santa Fe Mayor David Coss  
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I see the screen up there, and I was thinking only in Santa Fe would everybody be facing this way and the screen would be facing that way. It is a pleasure to be here this morning with the Water Resources Research Institute. I do kind of feel like I'm home a little bit. I used to go to lots of your meetings when I worked for the Environment Department in the Surface Water Quality Bureau, and I was staff for the Water

Quality Control Commission for a long time, which included a lot of water people in it.

It is really fun to see the students from New Mexico State University. I always was proud of being from New Mexico State, but that wouldn't always serve you well when you were around Steve Reynolds, who was a UNM guy. I remember once we had a Water Quality Control Commission meeting in Las

Cruces, and the assistant dean of agriculture, Wayne Cunningham, who was also on the commission, spoke. We were feeling so great to be in Las Cruces, and it was my turn to get up and make my presentation. I said, "I'm proud to say I'm an alumnus of New Mexico State as well." I thought that was a good way to start the talk, but one of the UNM guys on the commission said, "Well, we won't hold that against you." And then Steve Reynolds added, "Yes we will." It was downhill from there.

It is the job of the mayor to welcome folks to Santa Fe. We are always very, very glad that you are in Santa Fe. It is obligatory for mayors to say, "I hope you do a lot of shopping while you're here." We are very, very proud of our 400-year-old city. We are very, very proud

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of this hotel and of this beautiful downtown that you're in. We are glad that you chose Santa Fe and that you are here meeting in Santa Fe.

I'll have to tell my friends at the municipal league who say they can't meet in Santa Fe

because it is too expensive that the Water Resources Research Institute manages to do it. I think you will really enjoy being here in Santa Fe.

We have some of our water staff, like Claudia Borchert, here. If I say anything wrong, you need to talk to Claudia. We have a fantastic water system in Santa Fe. I think we really are a state and a national leader in that. You referred to our slight problems in Santa Fe. The year I got on the city council, we had the worst drought on record. We were a few days away, during Indian Market when there were an extra 50,000 people in town, from not being able to pump water out of our system. That kind of got everybody's attention. We had owned the water company for about four or five years at that point, but we said that things have got to change, that we have to do things differently in Santa Fe. We had to do a lot of things differently.

I think there is a great deal of effort and willingness on the part of the general public. We are getting further ahead of the curve right now, but there is a lot of work

to do. I would like to say that through our implementation of water conservation strategies, the city of Santa Fe, the people of Santa Fe, have conserved approximately 37,300 acre-feet of water since 1995. I like to talk about the fact that we live in a community that is anti-growth but wants affordable housing for their kids. We are always trying to figure out that dynamic. Really since 2002, we used 2,000 acre-feet less per year than we used in 2000. That is a tribute to the innovation of the community and the conservation efforts in the community.

Our per capita water use in Santa Fe has dropped from 170 gallons per person per day to approximately 106 gallons per person per day, and that includes all uses, except wholesale utility customers, like Las Campanas. We compare ourselves to other communities. Maybe there are two models developing. Compared to the city of Phoenix who has a demand of 270 gallons per person per day, Santa Fe is at 106. I think that we can do a lot better.

The long-range supply planning efforts for Santa Fe have concluded that Santa Fe will not need a major additional water supply project in the next 40 years. I am actually hoping that with some conservation and smart use of our resource we can extend that indefinitely into the future. It is probably a good thing that we won't need one for another 40 years because we haven't figured out how to pay for the Buckman direct diversion project that we're building now.

I wanted to indicate some of the things we are doing. We are doing long-range water supply modeling and planning. We are working on our long-range water supply plan right now to meet the community needs for 40 years. We see our strengths and our weaknesses in the system. It is a great place for hydrologists to work because we use mountain water. We use aquifers along the Santa Fe River. We use the Buckman aquifer, which is not as connected to the Rio Grande as originally thought. Now we are working on a project to bring the San Juan-Chama water into Santa Fe. It is a very diverse portfolio of water rights and water sources that we have in Santa Fe.

We have been tying growth since 2002 to the understanding that our water resources are limited. Anybody that gets a building permit in Santa Fe now has to either retrofit toilets—I think it is eight or ten toilets to twelve per household now—or you have to bring water rights to the table to get a building permit in Santa Fe. I think that is the kind of program that has led to continued growth and continued economic

## Welcoming Remarks

development in Santa Fe, but we have been flat in our water use. It went down 2,000 acre-feet, and we stay around 10,000 acre-feet of water use per year.

I had all of these great technical comments that the staff wrote for me, but I just wanted to leave it at that and say a few words. This is the group that is really going to help Santa Fe, help New Mexico, figure out its water future.

We think a lot in Santa Fe about the fact that we are 400 years old. You are very, very close right now as most of you probably know to the Santa Fe River. We kind of have to experience the Santa Fe River in relation to tourists. One question they ask, "Where is the river?" They can hardly believe it when you point it out to them. The other comment, which is even a little funnier, is that sometimes when you are by the Land Office, you will hear a group of tourists talking. The dad will say, "This, kids, is the Rio Grande." But it's just our Santa Fe River.

If you look at it now, it is inconceivable why anyone would form a villa de Santa Fe here. Our river is dead. It doesn't look like it would support water. It doesn't look like it would support agriculture. It doesn't look like you could get firewood from there. Why would you do that? Yet, we know that 400 years ago this was the desirable place to live. It has supported communities, and it has supported agriculture for over 400 years that we know of. When we talk to our Tesuque friends, they say it goes back a lot farther than that.

In my lifetime, the Santa Fe River has become a severely degraded river. There is a pipeline over the river that the City put in as a sewer line when I was a kid living by Casa Solana. It was 12 feet under the bed of the river. Now that pipeline is at the top of the 100-year floodplain. I can use words like 100-year floodplain. You can imagine that from the time I was a kid to the time I became an adult, and I know I'm getting older, that there was 30 feet of erosion, which means your water table came down 30 feet, which means your riparian system changed, which means you can't irrigate off the Santa Fe River anymore.

When you're mayor you have experiences like one I have every spring. Every spring, the farmers in La Bajada come to see me. They say, "If you don't let more water down the river, we are going to sue you as soon as the state gives us enough money to sue you." We've managed to avoid that situation year after year. It is a concern for all Santa Feans.

We are very active with the Farmer's Market. We really do want to sustain agriculture in New Mexico

and especially northern New Mexico. We know that our water rights purchases off of the Rio Grande are going to have some effects.

To put it back into my political perspective, I hang around with a lot of union guys and labor guys. I was always talking about needing to restore the river. It is a sign of whether we will make it as a community in Santa Fe. They asked me, "Dave, why are you always talking about that?" I said, "Well, you know it is just interesting to me. I think it is important." Then they did some polling, because you always do polling to see what works and what doesn't. The polls came back, and my campaign manager, the old labor guy, says, "Keep talking about the river, Dave." In Santa Fe, that poll indicated a 75% approval, which was more popular than anything else I was talking about in that campaign.

The citizens want a restored Santa Fe River. They want a healthy watershed. They want housing and economic development and growth for their community, but they also want to know that the acequias are going to be there. They want to know that the farmers in La Bajada get the water that they've had for the last several hundred years and continue to farm. I think the Water Resources Research Institute and the kind of work that you folks do all over the state is going to give us those tools, techniques, and information so that we can continue to make this balance out in Santa Fe and all over New Mexico.

I have really enjoyed listening to the upstream/downstream dialogues that are going on concerning the Rio Grande. We all have great plans regionally for what we are going to do with water, but when you add it all up, we are all saying that we are going to take water from the other basins and bring it in here. It is great to get an upstream/downstream perspective on the Rio Grande. That is not what is going to happen; that is not what is going to work. We've got a lot of work still to figure out how we are going to live in New Mexico for another 400 years. I can tell you that the people of New Mexico, the people of Santa Fe, want us to figure it out so that we can have our cities, have our housing, and have our economies. We want living rivers. We want sustainable agriculture. That is the job that you guys have to help us figure out.

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to Santa Fe. It is great to be back talking to WRRI conference participants. I wish you every success in your conference. Thank you for helping New Mexico and Santa Fe figure out how to make the best use of what is the most precious resource we have. Thank you.