



*High and Dry: The Texas-New Mexico Struggle for the Pecos River, by G. Emlen Hall, is published by the University of New Mexico Press, 2002*

Reviewed by **Chris Nunn Garcia, Ph.D.**

I finished *High and Dry* looking forward to the movie. Gary Cooper would play Steve Reynolds, New Mexico's craggy, compelling State Engineer. Spencer Tracy was born to play Charles Meyers, the witty and mercurial Texan who was Special Master in the Pecos River lawsuit from 1984 until his death in the saddle in 1988. Still, I was glad I read the book first. Movies are fine for action stories, but it takes literature to describe a passionate hatred like the one between Texas and New Mexico. Em Hall has given us literature, a story of relationships, intrigue and passion. The Pecos River, the Pecos River Compact, Texas v. New Mexico, and Em himself are at the same time characters and setting, context and plot. It's a remarkable achievement.

It's easy to find Em in this story of the Pecos. His account of his own role in Texas v. New Mexico incorporates the New Mexican's wry, self-deprecating humor, and his perspective is candidly New Mexican, too: "from the start" he says "I had an extreme case of upstream vision."

Hall has another relationship with the river. In his wonderful concluding chapter he says "What I really love to do with New Mexico water is irrigate." In Cundiyo, using water from the Rio Frijoles, Hall grows what his neighbor calls "the most expensive chile in the world." And, obviously, it's worth every cent. Understanding New Mexico water

requires an appreciation for the irrigator's slow stubborn love for the ditch and the land, a value that doesn't lend itself to analytic language. This chapter, "The Value of Water, Inch by Inch, Row by Row," will be assigned in any future water economics class I teach.

Hall also loves State Engineer Steve Reynolds, New Mexico's water champion. His story of Reynolds and the Pecos River is a lover's tale. He knows the faults of both Reynolds and the Pecos better than any "objective" observer and in more detail. He doesn't apologize for those faults; he details them with the absorption of a poet eulogizing his mistress's beloved blemishes.

I am not alone in having been puzzled by the Pecos River Compact and its draconian administration following Texas v. New Mexico (Supreme Court Justice Byron White called "this miserable case" a "dog."). As Hall's story unfolded, the light began to dawn. The problem of equitably

apportioning the waters of the Pecos between New Mexico and Texas seems impossible because it is. Aha! This book is essential to understanding how this odd and important compact came to be.

The Chapter, "New Mexico Stumbles," which covers New Mexico's post-decree Pecos administration, leaves something to be desired. Tom Turney, the present State Engineer, gets short shrift. Oddly, it doesn't even mention Norm Gaume, Turney's brilliant, aggressive and very complicated Interstate Stream Engineer. Hall brushes by Gaume and Turney's fascinating confrontation with the feds over Endangered Species Act minimum flows and dismisses the state's complex and flawed water rights acquisition program with disdain but little detail. The book's value must rest on the story of the compact and the litigation, where it is precious indeed.

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