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discussions with the project management team, with all parties eventually reaching a common (more or less) viewpoint about the project. This allowed the technical assistance providers to clearly communicate project objectives to the regional groups, and created an open and honest dialogue with all parties.

Perhaps the most surprising outcome was the regional groups' willingness to work together and consider collaborative approaches that had been previously rejected; it seemed that the time had come for a new approach at the local level as well. No one was ready to commit to regional consolidation, but no one rejected the idea outright, either. Communities were willing to talk to their neighbors

and found more shared interests than differences. Unfortunately, the next barrier became immediately apparent: just how do rural entities collaborate with the state in this new program? How do public and private entities agree to work together, and even to merge? Where will the money originate to fund the projects that result from communities working together?

Future Challenges

New Mexico is still developing the answers to these questions. A review by the Utton Transboundary Resources Center at the University of New Mexico revealed that there are no less than twenty-seven statutes under which a water system can be organized. But none are suitable for regional rural water systems. It is apparent that the legislature will have to consider

updating our statutes to provide rural water systems with the tools that they need. The biggest challenge will come in the form of reforming the funding process itself: giving priority to well-planned, regional projects will require the cooperation of all of the region's legislators and the governor. Without this key component, all of this work will fall apart.

We are aware that other states, probably most, have addressed these problems already. But, as civil war hero and former governor of New Mexico Lew Wallace stated, "All calculations based on our experiences elsewhere fail in New Mexico." That is, after all, part of the charm of the Land of Enchantment!

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