

SANTA FE + NEW MEXICAN
 TWO GREAT WAYS TO ENJOY UNLIMITED DIGITAL ACCESS
 1 \$12.95 Total access PRINT + DIGITAL
 2 \$9.95 Online access DIGITAL ONLY



NEWS BRIEFS
 SANTA FE + NEW MEXICAN

ARCHIVES PLACE CLASSIFIED AD SUBSCRIBE ADVERTISING RATES

Search



LOCAL NEWS

HOME NEWS SPORTS OPINION PASATIEMPO MAGAZINES LIFE MULTIMEDIA CONTACT US

Welcome! [Login](#) | [Signup](#)
[Subscribe](#) [Classifieds](#)

Thanks for visiting [SantaFeNewMexican.com](#). You're entitled to view 10 free articles every 30 days, and you currently have 6 total free articles remaining (0 before being asked to register and 6 before being asked to subscribe). Then, if you enjoy our site and want full access, we'll ask you to purchase an affordable subscription.

6 Remaining

WATER WORRIES

New Mexico grapples with tough choices amid drought

Print Font Size: 31

Recommend 182 Tweet 10 2



A trickle of water left in the Rio Grande is pushed downstream by the wind near the chile growing community of Hatch. Susan Montoya Bryan/The Associated Press

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum
 505 948-1000 217 Johnson St. Santa Fe

www.okeeffemuseum.org

Le Bon Voyage
 luggage • bags • accessories
 Santa Fe's TUMI Authorized Dealer

25% OFF ends 4/30/13
 ALPHA LIGHTWEIGHT COLLECTION
 328 S. Guadalupe, Santa Fe • lbvbags.com • 986.1260

Submit Your News

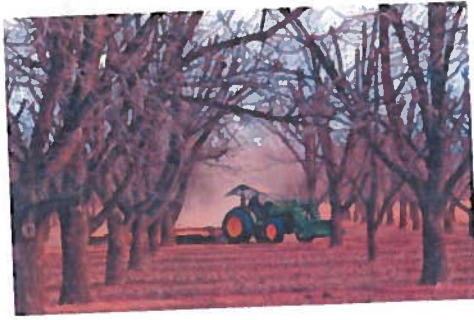
EXHIBIT

AG 47

[Previous](#) [Next](#)

Posted: Wednesday, April 24, 2013 11:10 pm |
 Updated: 12:04 pm, Thu Apr 25, 2013.

MCST READ MCST COMMENTED



A tractor prepares a pecan orchard last month near Rincon, N.M., for the spring irrigation season. Farmers in Southern New Mexico's Hatch and Mesilla valleys are worried about dwindling water supplies as the state enters its third straight year of drought. Susan Montoya Bryan/The Associated Press



[View all 4 images in gallery.](#)

Associated Press | 5 comments

HATCH — In Southern New Mexico, the mighty Rio Grande has gone dry — reduced to a sandy wash winding from this chile farming community to the nation's leading pecan-producing county. Only puddles remain, leaving gangs of carp to huddle together in a desperate effort to avoid the fate of thousands of freshwater clams, their shells empty and broken on the river bottom.

Across the state's eastern plains, wells stand empty and ranchers are selling their cattle. In the north, urbanites face watering restrictions while rural residents see the levels of their springs dropping more every day.

Going on three years, drought has had a hold on nearly every square mile of New Mexico. Now, with forecasts predicting hotter, drier weather ahead, farmers

and small and large communities alike are questioning whether dwindling supplies can be stretched enough to avoid costly fights over water.

From the chile fields and pecan orchards of the Hatch and Mesilla valleys to Albuquerque, Santa Fe and beyond, New Mexicans are facing tough choices and dire consequences.

"Last year my son said, 'Mom, what do we let die? The hay, the wheat, the onions or the chile?'" said Rena Carson, whose family owns a chile-drying plant and spice company in the Hatch Valley and ships tons of products around the world annually.

In the last two years, the family has drilled two new wells to draw more irrigation water, but the groundwater level in the valley continues to drop — and the wells can't be drilled any deeper. This year, the family had to let 20 of their 800 acres go uncultivated.

Throughout these valleys, patches of farmland that should be verdant are brown and sit idle. Some pecan growers have trimmed trees to their trunks to save on watering. Others are drilling new wells and installing pipelines to make the most of every drop pumped. Some are sharing water and splitting the costs of pumping with neighboring farmers, or buying up land for the water rights.

Pecan growers rely mostly on wells to irrigate. Without a flowing river, the aquifers that feed the wells have little chance of being recharged.

"When that river is flowing, everything is fine," said Dickie Salopek, whose family has hundreds of acres of pecan trees in Doña Ana County, the top pecan-producing county in the U.S. "When it's not flowing, you better be thinking outside the box."

New Mexico produces more than 60 million pounds of pecans annually, while its world-famous chiles infuse an estimated \$300 million into the economy each year.

In Hatch, the self-proclaimed "Chile Capital of the World," drinking-water wells have dropped, and the Pepper Pot restaurant is charging for tap water. "WATER50," reads a note on a menu advertising enchiladas and tacos smothered with

- 1 Alleged DWI crash injures four (10)
- 2 Divorced couple reunite, plan new future together after accident (2)
- 3 Taos fashion designer comes up short in 'Project Runway' (8)
- 4 Officials: Man kills ex-girlfriend, self in Española (6)
- 5 Santa Fe child dies in apparent accident (5)
- 6 Councilors approve support of same-sex marriage (27)
- 7 New Mexico grapples with tough choices amid drought (5)
- 8 Police: Church stabbing sparked by 'Mason' fear (4)
- 9 "Sex and the Citadel: Intimate Life in a Changing Arab World" (1)
- 10 Couple get in TV show's spotlight to get out of the sun (6)

COLUMNISTS



LARRY TORRES

Growing Up Spanglish: Crampo explica el Taos hum



ROBERT NOTT

Learning Curve: Program offers a glimpse of teachers' joys, challenges



ORLANDO ROMERO

Water is a human right, not just a commodity



STEVE TERRELL

New push to open primaries



BILL STEWART

Understanding Your World: Bombings tied to Caucasus turmoil



WILL WEBBER

Bat boy: The best job ever

chile. Town officials worry about finding new sources of water for the area's chile farms. Without them, said former town trustee Andy Nunez, the village would wither.

"That's what we're afraid of," he said.

Across the eastern plains, the story is the same. Wells that provide drinking water are going dry, ranchers have been forced to sell off cattle, hay prices have skyrocketed, and reservoirs have reached record low levels — leaving little surface water for downstream users.

"We are really facing some extraordinary challenges," said Dennis McQuillan with the state Drinking Water Bureau. He pointed to residential wells outside of Santa Fe that are going dry and the potential for the city of Clovis to drain its aquifer in the next 20-40 years.

Most rural communities have robust wells, but members of the New Mexico Rural Water Association said water levels have been drawn down and that the drought and effects of wildfires are complicating their ability to keep some reservoirs full.

"The drought is a slowly building disaster," said Matt Holmes, the association's executive director.

In southeastern New Mexico, farmers in Carlsbad are demanding that groundwater users in Roswell and Artesia stop pumping in order to protect their rights to water in the Pecos River. A similar fight is happening on the Rio Grande, with Texas asking the U.S. Supreme Court to keep New Mexico from pumping and to force the state to send more water to farmers in El Paso.

In northeastern New Mexico, the spring that feeds rural Wagon Mound is dropping. Village officials worked with the state to develop a plan to keep the spring flowing, something McQuillan said could be a model as many of the state's 1,200-plus water systems consider revamping their water protection plans to make infrastructure improvements or find alternative water sources.

The dismal conditions of 2011 and 2012 made for the warmest and driest two-year period in New Mexico since forecasters began keeping track more than a century ago. Last year marked the second-driest year on record, with precipitation at 60 percent of normal. Snowpack in some places was half of normal heading into spring, leaving little hope that mountain moisture will reach the Rio Grande or other waterways.

Much of the U.S. faces persistent drought conditions, as well.

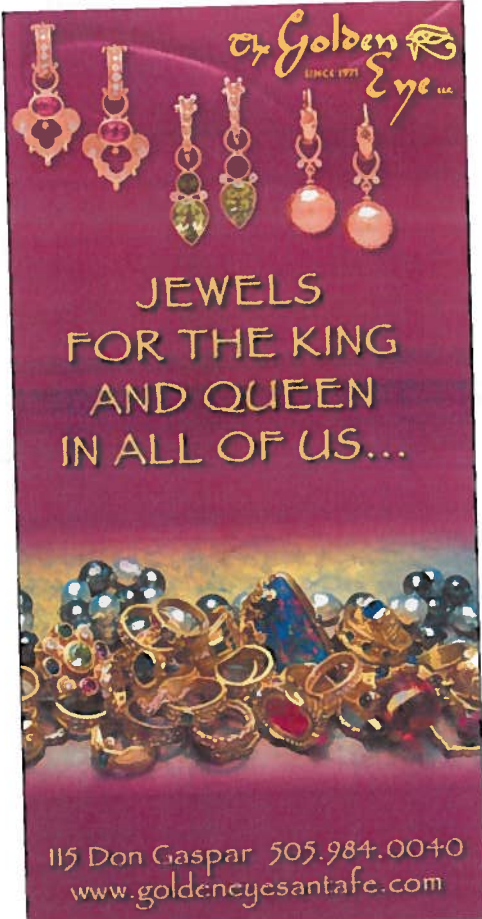
Models from the National Climatic Data Center show it would take more than a foot of rain over the next six months to end drought conditions in parts of the state. However, forecasts show no significant moisture on the horizon.

Albuquerque and other cities already have imposed restrictions limiting the days and times at which residents may water outdoors. And in the Hatch and Mesilla valleys, leveling farmland and orchards with lasers has become the norm to ensure water doesn't pool and go to waste.

Pecan grower Greg Daviet is changing his watering schedule to irrigate trees when their roots are primed to absorb the most moisture. He's also testing a new sensor that monitors soil moisture at different depths.

Unlike chile, onions, alfalfa and cotton, pecan trees can't go a year without water. They will die and take with them generations of cultivation and investment. Some New Mexico orchards are more than 70 years old.

"We have to farm them whether the resources are easy to get or not," Daviet said.



The Golden Eye
SINCE 1971

JEWELS
FOR THE KING
AND QUEEN
IN ALL OF US...

115 Don Gaspar 505.984.0040
www.goldeneyesantafe.com

The advertisement features a collection of jewelry including necklaces, earrings, and rings, displayed against a dark background. The text is in a gold, serif font.

"It hurts right now, but it will get better. It's been wet before. It's been dry before. It will be both again, and there's not a whole lot I can do about it anyway."

© 2013 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Recommend 182 Tweet 10 2 31

Discuss Print

Posted in **Local news**, **Earth week** on *Wednesday, April 24, 2013 11:10 pm*. Updated: 12:04 pm.

More Stories

- State worker gets spot on television game show
- Signs stolen amid vote on Eldorado rules
- Santa Fe Network for the Common Good founder turns 95
- Residents voice concerns over plans for rodeo arena
- Museum Hill gardens begin to take shape as summer opening nears

Most Read

- Alleged DWI crash injures four
- Divorced couple reunite, plan new future together after accident
- Taos fashion designer comes up short in Project Runway
- Officials: Man kills ex-girlfriend, self in Espanola
- Santa Fe child dies in apparent accident

Rules of Conduct

Click the text above to view

Welcome to the discussion.

<p>Screen Name or Email <input type="text"/></p> <p>Password <input type="password"/> Forgot?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Remember me on this computer</p> <p><input type="button" value="Login"/></p>	<p>Or, use your linked account:</p> <p><input type="button" value="facebook"/></p> <p><input type="button" value="google"/></p> <p><input type="button" value="yahoo"/></p> <p><input type="button" value=""/></p> <p><input type="button" value=""/></p>
---	--

[Need an account? Create one now.](#)

5 comments:

Garland posted at 8:39 am on Sun, Apr 28, 2013.

Posts: 1

Certainly the city of Santa Fe is not grappling with the drought as noted by one letter writer on 28April. I have also seen the city watering benches on the plaza instead of keeping the water in the hanging potted plants. And what about the city's contemplated action to release an enormous amount of water into the so-called river to keep non-native as well as native vegetation alive?

[Log In to report.](#) [Link](#) [Reply](#)

barko1 posted at 4:08 pm on Thu, Apr 25, 2013.