

The Wildwood Highlander is a periodic newsletter providing information to property owners in Wildwood Highlands, near Datil, NM. Hard copy is mailed to all requesting owners. Published at least annually in Datil, NM by the Wildwood Highlands Landowners' Association, POB 87, Datil NM 87821-0087. For further information contact any member of the WHLA Board of Directors (BoD), listed below. Also consult the WHLA website at www.wildwoodhighlands.org .

2015 ANNUAL MEETING

The 2015 WHLA annual meeting was held on 17 May at the Datil Well Campground Pavilion, starting at approximately 10 AM MDT. Attendance was again slim, as it usually is when there are no contentious issues afloat. Full details are in the meeting minutes, posted on the website.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

The "new" Board met immediately following the general meeting on 16 May, and again on 6 July. The only business conducted was the election of officers. New Board member Wayne Cooksey is our new president; long-serving past-president Tom Cook had asked to be relieved but volunteered to remain as Treasurer. The names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of the Directors are listed below. Meeting minutes are posted on the website. The next meeting will be on 6 September, and the year's last on 6 December.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

From WHLA BOD President Wayne Cooksey:

Hello folks. Secretary John asked for some input: I have not been a member of the board long enough to be able to give much info on the happenings in our Association, but I agreed to give him something to include. As the new president of the association, I don't have intent to make any major changes in the way things have been handled in the past. It looks to me like the board has done a good job!! I have served on a few boards and community club committees in the past and will do my best to help with this one. The roads continue to be the main issue (as I see it) and Jamie O'Gorman has done a good job in that area with the funds available. The problem with collecting the annual assessments (our only source of income!) is hopefully being addressed. Let me add at this point most everyone, according to what I see, is paying on time. With the limited amount that the association has to work with and the work that needs to be done, let's hope it continues to improve. Don't have any more at this time.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS & CONTACT INFORMATION

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UPDATE ON THE “GREAT WATER STEAL”

Submitted by Datil resident and longtime contributor to all good things local, Carol Pittman. Thank you, Carol.

All of us have a need for water, and all of us are becoming aware of water as a scarce commodity. As the water crisis grows, more and more of us will be affected, starting here in the southwest. While it may be tempting to focus only on the local picture, water problems cannot be solved without a glance at the big picture.

Look at the Local Picture First - In late 2007, the Augustin Plains Ranch LLC (APR LLC or APR) applied to the Office of the State Engineer (OSE) for permission to drill 37 wells to a depth of 2500 feet (later amended to 3000 feet) in order to pump 54,000 acre feet of water each year (afy) and pipe that water to the Rio Grande near Socorro. In the two iterations since that first application, the APR now proposes to pipe the water all the way to Bernalillo County. While it may seem unimportant to those of you not on the Plains, the phenomenon known as the cone of depression will draw water from a huge area, permanently drying up wells throughout northern Catron County. Frank Titus, the only hydrogeologist to study the Plains, estimated that if water is pumped at the rate requested, within 10 years all the water from the Plains would be depleted. Dennis Inman, local geologist, agrees with that estimate. The drawdown will cause the pockets that held water in the Plains to collapse, thus rendering the basin incapable of recharge.

Regional concerns - According to Frank Titus, water moves underground through the Augustin Plains aquifer to the Gila River. Pumping water from the Plains may therefore have a deleterious effect on the Gila River. If there is a plan – as there now appears to be – to divert 14,000 afy from the Gila River, how does the pumping of the Plains affect that project? Scientists have pointed out that there are dry years when the Gila River could not possibly provide the 14,000 acre feet of water planned for diversion; add to that the pumping of the Augustin Plains basin water and even more water will not reach the Gila River. “Southwest New Mexico’s future water needs can be met at a lower price through non-diversion projects, such as municipal and agricultural conservation, groundwater management, effluent reuse and watershed restoration. These projects would save twice the water that diversion would provide, and they cost much less” (Gila Conservation Coalition analysis).

Dennis Inman, a member of the southwest region planning committee, has proposed a hydrogeological investigation of the San Agustin Plains. “Water from the San Agustin Plains could be used in this region. Socorro Tech discovered that the Monticello Box is hydrologically connected to the San Agustin Basin and that there is leakage from San Agustin into the Alamos, Gila and Tularosa River Basins. – If there is consideration of water being allocated outside of regional area it is important to understand all the connections” (Southwest RWP Update, Draft Summary of Meeting, June 3, 2015).

And the State is connected as well - Many of you reading this newsletter are aware of the Santolina Project, a massive development planned for southwest of Albuquerque. A study of that plan combined with a study of the Augustin Plains Ranch LLC’s proposed pipeline reveals what could very well be a “beneficial use” of the Augustin Plains basin’s water. As you will recall, the applications (one and two) were rejected on the basis of very vague references to “beneficial use”, where specificity is required by New Mexico water law (a third application is now sitting in the Office of the State Engineer). The Santolina plan was approved by the Bernalillo County Board of County Commissioners, and a glance at the map will show you why we should be concerned. The pipeline proposed by APR LLC in its third application to the OSE goes right by this development on its way to the vicinity of the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority. This project is being fiercely opposed by a great number of citizens groups and the decision to approve is now being challenged in court. The relationship of the Santolina plan to the APR LLC application is only guesswork at this point, but it bears watching.

In conclusion, citizens here need to watch water decisions everywhere. It is only the combined efforts of all of us that can insure decisions that will secure our water future in New Mexico. And everyone can watch the newspapers for a legal announcement of the third APR LLC application. We can’t afford to miss that one.

ROAD REPORT

From WHLA BOD Vice-President Jamie O'Gorman, resident over 10 years

I have been given the opportunity of making our roads safe and in the best condition that I can provide. I have been fortunate to have re acquainted myself with the individual (Coy Craig) who worked on my personal driveway from the beginning. It is today what it was when he completed it over ten years ago. Our goal is to upgrade the quality of our roads by upgrading our culvert system in several new areas. Culverts are much needed in diverting the water flow. Our second challenge will be to eliminate the dirt roads that we currently using. In my opinion, there is only one solution that comes close in resolving our problem. Coy has a road base that consists of a combination of rock dust to crusher fines, along with several variations. Once this combination is laid, the weight of our vehicles will do the rest! Since all of this will be costly, we cannot do it in one stage, so please be patient. I truly believe that the end result will be well worth the wait. Thank you.

THE BOD PURSUES FORECLOSURE

After many years of considering its options regarding non-payment of annual assessments and related late fees and other costs, the BOD has decided to engage an attorney to pursue foreclosure on one of our Highlands properties. The amount owed at the time of this action was almost \$5000. Lien claims against the property had been filed in 2006 and 2010 but resulted in naught. The Board regrets the necessity of this action but seems to have had no other recourse.

FROM WEATHERMAN CHUCK

Resident Chuck Baker continues to keep records of the weather ...

I operate under the notion that for something to qualify as a "fact" it can be described mathematically (i.e. with a number or formula); if that something can't be described mathematically, it's merely an opinion. So the following can be viewed as some facts and a couple of opinions.

In general, the 5-month period January through May had close to average temperatures and above average precipitation. January was particularly wet with 13" of recorded snowfall, and we had measureable precipitation for all five months totaling 3.51" (this figure includes melted snowfall), more than three times normal. The previous five years, 2010 – 2014, had an average total precipitation for the same Jan-May time period of 1.02", with many of those months recording no precipitation at all.

The month of May, typically the time when Wildwood Highlands gardens get planted, was much cooler than normal. The average daily low temperature was 40.9 degrees and the average daily high temperature was only 67.4 degrees, both records for the 16 years I've been keeping weather stats. Over the previous 15 years, the average low was 45.7 and the average high was 75.6 degrees.

During May we experienced a prolonged weather pattern of clouds and storms that brought unusual amounts of rainfall to much of New Mexico, particularly the northern and eastern sections of the state, but only resulted in .58" for the month at my location, although I had 6 days with trace amounts – not enough to register even .01" on my electronic rain gauge, but enough to get surfaces wet. This same prolonged May weather pattern of mostly cooler and cloudy days, when it exited NM and headed east across the middle part of the country and picked up more moisture from the Gulf of Mexico, is what led to rainfall records being broken and destructive flooding in Texas and other states.

Weather experts attribute this wetter and cooler spring pattern to the jet stream, which guides weather systems across the country, behaving differently than normal and which may be related to warming sea temperatures and less ice in the arctic. Typically the jet stream often has an oscillating motion which causes high and low

pressure areas to fluctuate their locations so that any storms that occur change their paths frequently enough so that no one area is constantly getting rained on. However, this spring the jet stream did not behave like that, instead it tended to act like a conveyor belt that stayed in place and brought disturbance after disturbance across the southwest and beyond. The high pressure dome that typically sits over AZ/NM at this time of year never really got established, and as a result we had more clouds/storms/rainfall this spring.

The good news about our spring precipitation is that rain in April and May often stimulates the Pinyon Pines so numerous here in Wildwood Highlands to produce a good crop of pine nuts. The bad news is that wetter springs sometimes mean a below average monsoon season.

UPDATE 7/23/15: Cooler temps and cloudy skies have predominated since June 1st. June was slightly cooler than average and had .45" of recorded rainfall spread over 6 days, plus 5 days of trace amounts, which may have made it seem wetter than it actually was, and not even close to the 1.75" record for June rain in 2006, but better than the zero amounts we've had in many Junes. July has had slightly less than 2" of rain so far, but including days with trace amounts, there have only been 3 days in July without rain hitting the ground. July temps have been cooler than normal due to a near daily higher percentage of cloud cover overhead. Final July Numbers are (16 year averages in "()"): Rainfall 2.30" (2.61") Avg. High Temp. 79.4 (85.5); Avg. Low Temp. 54.8 (57.1).

CONFessions OF A LOA SECRETARY - *Anonymous (and unsolicited)*

I am a LOA secretary. As are most such servants, I am unpaid for my services. My service started in optimism, ignorance and bliss. It will end, if I can ever find a successor, in bitterness, rancor, and regret. My hope is that by publishing this account I can save some poor soul hours of regret and anguish and frustration (by not volunteering). The reader should understand that many of the comments here, while generally true and deeply felt, are overstated.

On the whole it's not an onerous or time consuming job. In theory, only twice a year do I work hard, and then on for a few hours for a few days. Those times are when I mail out the annual notices of assessment and collect the subsequent payments, and when I mail the notice of the annual Association meetings. Those, and four brief Board of Directors meetings, always enjoyable get-togethers with genial friends, describe the job. In theory ...

But the new Association secretary is rarely told about the few landowners who make the job a never-ending trial of frustration and regret. The ones who don't pay until you have exhausted your patience with reminding and cajoling and re-reminding and pleading. The ones who year after year claim they did not receive the notice. The ones who don't read the notice and underpay, and who then must be asked and re-asked to pay up. The ones whose negligence consumes hour after hour of your time. The ones who promise but then fail to keep the promise. The ones who make you regret that you volunteered for this job.

If you see yourself in this narrative please give consideration to the message ... and to the messenger. Think about how much extra time it took you this year to square up with the Association. Then think about how much your (in-) actions affected the guy on the other end. Then think about how it must be for him/her to deal with 10 or 20 such folks, year after year.

This is not a plea for a pay raise. It is a plea for simple consideration of the guy/gal you are dealing with and for a resolve to do better next time. While overstated, it is honest. And I truly do not wish to persuade potential successors from volunteering ... for obvious reasons!

The author of this piece is a well-known and much-admired gentleman, handsome and usually reserved and quiet, who prefers to remain anonymous on this occasion. He is known to the Association Secretary (no relation) and may be contacted through same. The author has granted permission for publication here of his work, and also for distribution without restriction.