

**Commissioner Mike Connor**

**Jan. 5, 2012, Education Center, Rio Grande Nature Center, Albuquerque, N.M. speaking to stakeholders, non-government organization representatives and others**

I'm Mike Connor, Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation. It's an absolute pleasure to be in my home state. And it's certainly an honor to be up here with these great conservation leaders, Secretary Salazar, Senator Bingaman [and] Congressman Heinrich. Particularly for me, being here with my present boss and my former boss, I just always feel the need to say this, not because it's the right thing to say, because I believe it's just a tremendous opportunity that I've had in my career to work for these two men, who I continue to learn from.

Even from last night being in El Paso talking through some water issues down south and then being in Carlsbad this morning, just seeing their approach to solving problems and working with people and bringing them together, it's just amazing to watch. And it's something that certainly I want to replicate, I know Dan wants to replicate, that's the way we want to do business. So, we've got great examples to learn from.

Particularly, because of the connection here, I think this is a place in particular that we can bring people together. We've done that over the past five, six, seven, eight years, I think we made great progress in the middle Rio Grande basin. But we've got to look beyond that because we've got upcoming challenges.

Reclamation's role, whether it be here or elsewhere, is we deliver water, we generate power and we protect and we restore the environment. Those are the three big areas that we work in and they are areas that are not separate from each other. We have to do each one of those well to protect the other mission activities that we have.

We've got to take care of this river environment, we've got to protect the resources if we're going to continue to deliver water, to generate power, to give the certainty that people need to continue the economic activity that they've become to depend on.

So, we want to do that, we're great believers in the win-win solutions here that we can do all three of these things well working in partnership with you all. That's certainly our goal, for the reasons I stated.

In particular, the middle Rio Grande area, as Dan talked about, we've been focused, we at reclamation in particular, about, over the past five, six, seven, eight years, complying with and implementing the activities that we need to do under the current biological opinion.

But over the last year we've really transitioned to looking beyond that and seeing what we're going to be doing over the next 10-plus years to, once again, delivering water, taking care of the environment, just solving those problems that we need to solve within this particular stretch of the Rio Grande.

Mike Hammon, our area manager here, has done a terrific job at working with all of you. I think we've got a strong foundation in place. We've had some great successes over the last six, seven, eight years. As Senator Bingaman mentioned, 2001, 2002, 2003, this was just a hotbed of conflict. At that point in time we've managed to collectively calm things down and work on some solutions.

We've restored something in the neighborhood of 1,500 acres of restoration work along the Rio Grande. We've acquired 200,000 acre feet of water that we put down the river in an effective manner and kept improving the way we do that over the last five-plus years.

We spent a lot of money in the process. We got a lot of support from Congress as well as recently from the administration in investing some resources in this valley. We don't have that much water; we probably won't have that much money as we move forward.

But we do have a strong foundation of partnership of federal agencies, working with state, local entities, with the Pueblos; I think we built a trust. We all know that we're trying to protect each other's livelihoods as we do better implementation of the Endangered Species Act, working all together in that effort.

So, I'm optimistic about what's in store for our future. My sense is that once we get this biological opinion in place, I think we have a sense of urgency about that. That that builds a strong foundation to then build upon that effort and go up with all the activity that's going on in the middle Rio Grande basin.

The stuff that the city's doing, the county's doing, other agencies like the Corps [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers] are doing restoration efforts, recreation activities that they're building, we can all participate in that effort.

I just think that if we do that as far as we've come in the last 10 years we're going to be even much further in the next 10 years. And that's what we're looking to be supportive of.

Thank you for your attention. From this I'll pass it on to...