

Augustin Plains Ranch refloats plan to pipe water to ABQ



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APR says it already has spent about \$3 million investigating the possibility of the project and [has now submitted an application with the Office of the State Engineer](#) to see if an official hearing process can be established.

In 2007, the owners of the ranch, described on its website as a collection of family foundations, submitted a plan to transfer the water. [It was turned down in 2012](#) “because it was vague, over broad, lacked specificity, and the effects of granting it cannot reasonably be evaluated; problems which are contrary to public policy,” according to the Office of the State Engineer. The ranch challenged the denial in court, but the engineer’s decision was upheld.

If it is allowed the proceed, the project is estimated to cost \$600 million, said Whitney Waite, a spokeswoman for APR.

“After many months of work, we are pleased to present the OSE with an application that provides information which we believe will allow the project to move forward,” Michel Jichlinski, the project director, said in a news release. “This is a very big step in developing a new and sustainable source of water for New Mexicans for generations to come.”

The Augustin Plains Ranch owns more than 17,000 acres of land in the San Augustin Plains, much of it sitting atop an aquifer.

The project, if developed, would involve drilling 37 wells on the ranch and transporting the water northward through a 140-mile pipeline that would run along existing highway right-of-ways, according to the application.

APR said the state engineer's office is expected to decide within several weeks if a hearing should be pursued. That hearing process, according to APR, could last for up to two years.

That would involve a comprehensive study of the area's hydrology, potential impacts to local communities, pipeline right-of-way issues, legal and compact challenges among other issues, according to APR.

If approved, APR estimates water could begin flowing into the Albuquerque area in about five years. "The full and open hearing process will enable New Mexicans to be certain that the project is viable, sustainable, and in the state's best interest," Jichlinski said. "The research that will be conducted during the hearing phase will be invaluable in providing data on this resource that is currently sorely lacking. We look forward to having this conversation with all who are interested and wish to fully understand the incredible potential of the San Augustin Basin."

According to its proposal, APR would build structures designed to capture the run-off from the nearby mountain range and recharge the aquifer to replace what water is withdrawn from it.

At this point, according to APR, it's too early to determine what return investors would receive.

However, in an attachment to the application, the investment bank Ewing Bemiss & Co. said it has reviewed the proposal and believes it wouldn't have problems attracting investors.