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# New Eco-friendly Water Pipeline Project Unveiled at National Conference

*New Mexico ranch hopes to transport 54 thousand acre-feet of water annually across the desert to communities in need*

NEW YORK CITY — As New Mexico’s drought and demand-driven water crisis continues to deepen, leaders from around the state are looking hard for viable, long-term solutions to both sustain the state’s population growth and protect its fragile natural environment. One of the most promising options, the Augustin Plains Ranch project, was unveiled to the nation for the first time this week at the Global Infrastructure Leadership Forum in New York City.

The Augustin Plains Ranch, located in west-central New Mexico, is proposing to develop an eco-friendly, water reclamation and transport project that will pump 54 thousand acre-feet of water out of a massive underground lake and pipe it to communities in need anywhere from Santa Fe to Southern New Mexico. This “green” project will operate under its own electricity produced through hydro and solar power, and will replenish the aquifer over the years with rainwater and snowmelt that is currently being lost to evaporation. It is also expected to create hundreds of permanent jobs for New Mexicans.

During the conference, the project was named as part of the year’s Strategic 100 — a ranking for the top 100 global infrastructure projects. Norman Anderson, CEO of CG/LA Infrastructure, the firm that ran the conference, said the projects included in the top 100 “not only represent best practices, but also symbolize this generation’s legacy for the next generation — they are literally our design for the future.”

“We are excited about the very real possibility of delivering this volume of water to users along the Rio Grande corridor, and doing it in a way that sustains the ground water supply for centuries to come,” said Michel Jichlinski, project manager. “Augustin Plains Ranch, through a public-private partnership, has the potential to alleviate many of the state’s most pressing water problems. We are

looking forward to the next phase of research and assessment which will shed even more light on the viability of this proposal.”

The ancient lake is 7,000 feet above sea level and 2,000 feet below ground beneath the plains of San Augustin. Augustin Plains Ranch, located approximately 150 miles southwest of Albuquerque, sits atop a portion of the lake and like most of the surrounding area, is currently being used for cattle ranching. The lake holds an estimated 50 million acre-feet of water. By building a state-of-the-art water reclamation system at the foot of the hills, natural evaporation in the area can be significantly reduced and the underground lake replenished at a rapid rate. The system will greatly contribute to the conservation of the Colorado and Rio Grande watersheds' streams and rivers.

According to Jichlinski, the project needs to be given an official hearing by the New Mexico State Engineer in order for a full and complete assessment to move forward.

“Only when this happens can a final determination about the future of the project be made,” he said.

Augustin Plains Ranch applied for its original application in 2007. Recent favorable legislation and a growing need to identify and develop new sources of water have brought the project to the forefront of discussion in New Mexico.

“We are working to address any questions from the State Engineer and other government entities as we move forward. Because we are confident that the process is finally going in the right direction, we are introducing it to the public,” Jichlinski said. “This conference in New York gave us a perfect opportunity to discuss the merits of the proposal and to let the country know what is being done to locate and develop new sources of water in the American West. It’s a very exciting time.”

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