

Stormwater authority sought

Task force recommends a regional approach to watershed issues

By **Marvin Tessneer**
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The Stormwater and Watershed Infrastructure Management (SWIM) task force is calling for the formation of a regional authority, task force members said Tuesday, April 6, at the Doña Ana County Government Center.

The speakers said different agencies have all the information about stormwater and watersheds, but the data isn't coordinated for the agencies to make effective decisions.

SWIM Chairman Joe Delk said Doña Ana County has more than 40 retention dams to capture storm runoff water, but most are 50 years old. They were built to protect farmland and roads. The Mesilla Valley has since become more urbanized, so more flood protection is

needed, he said.

Delk also is chairman of the Doña Ana County Soil and Water Conservation Service, and its mandates include flood control, reducing erosion and protecting property and public safety.

"The dynamics have changed because now a lot of homes have moved in up and down the valley. A lot of people are living there," Delk said Tuesday. "Also, the minimum standards for flood control have changed. We realized that those old dams haven't been touched since they were built. We need a regional authority because homeowners don't know where to go."

Many of these old dams are on Bureau of Land Management property and need renovation to control floodwaters, such as cleaning

out and depositing sediment, access and clearing environmental impact studies. But that requires BLM clearance, "and that could be a long process," Delk said.

Housing developments also have added road surfaces, which cause excessive storm runoff, water that could recharge the subsurface aquifer that is vital for municipal wells and irrigation.

"We need to organize an approach to manage storm water," Delk said. "We're talking about public safety, protecting lives and property. It would be prudent to start thinking of water regulations now. We have a unique opportunity to do the right thing."

The SWIM task force is made up of members from the Doña Ana and Sierra county

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