

## **Conservancy District Dumps Trail Improvements along Griegos Drain**

As some of you may have read in the media, a few weeks ago, the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District has decided to quit the Ditches with Trails project, a joint endeavor of the city, county, state, national parks service, and almost a score of neighborhood organizations in the North and South Valley. MRGCD had been a member of that endeavor in the past, and was cooperating, I thought, in a very constructive way—until now. Fearing some kind of “take over” of the MRGCD’s authority over the ditches, and reacting to a well organized group who used misleading tactics to stir up fear of a paved, urbanized trail effort that would benefit recreationalists from outside their area, the Board stopped the project without even considering the feasibility report.

It further criticized Bernalillo County for cost overruns on a footbridge over the Griegos lateral in the North Valley built with funds I appropriated. The bridge, which had been licensed by the District, was built in response to concern over safety of the small, rickety crossing there—which may have been a factor in the accidental death of a young Los Ranchos doctor. The bridge incorporated public art, and required the relocation of some large PNM telephone lines. The widow of the doctor (who had earlier decided not to sue the district) was at the board meeting, and was told callously by one board member that she shouldn’t expect any special treatment just because her husband had died.

This was the first time I’d been to a MRGCD Board meeting in years—and I won’t forget it for a long time. Sure there was disagreement over this project, and the bridge was controversial, but the process reinforced the long-held perception that the district cannot cooperate with other jurisdictions, is willing to go back on its agreements, undermine its own staff and insult members of the public.

Both before and after this meeting, I’ve gotten quite a few questions about what we ratepayers here in the Valley get for our taxes, particularly if we do not irrigate using ditch water. I’ve responded with what the Conservancy has told me publicly: We get access to the natural, green ditch system for hiking, biking and other recreational activities. Now I’m not so sure that they really want recreational access to the ditches.

Maybe, as some of the columnists and critics have long suggested, the Conservancy should be abolished, or financed only with the revenue from those farmers who use the water. Presently, the bulk of the revenue comes from Bernalillo County, where most ratepayers do not irrigate and agriculture is shrinking.

Let me know what you think.

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