

# New Mexico Approves First State Water Plan

2003 was New Mexico's driest year in 47 years, prompting steps by New Mexico's legislature to develop a state-wide water plan. On December 17, 2003, the State's first comprehensive water plan was approved by the Interstate Stream Commission. Comments and feedback from more than 1,500 people at 29 public meetings across the state were taken into account in the final document.

"This plan is a first look at the water issues affecting the future of our state," said chairman of the Interstate Stream Commission Jim Dunlap. "I would ask all of our citizens to keep in mind that this is a working document and should be improved periodically. We must commit ourselves now to work together and better understand our future water needs."

## The Plan's goals include:

- Promoting stewardship of the State's water resources;
- Protecting and maintaining water rights and their priority status;
- Protecting the diverse customs, culture, environment and economic stability of the State;
- Protecting both the water supply and water quality;
- Promoting cooperative strategies, based on concern for meeting the basic needs of all New Mexicans;
- Meeting the State's interstate compact obligations;
- Providing statewide continuity of policy and management relative to water resources.

As New Mexico moves into the 21st century, the new State Water Plan will help put in place the legal and physical structures so that the State can continue to provide for

growth in population and industry.

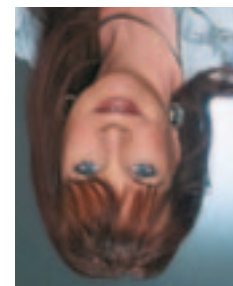
To view the first draft of the comprehensive State Water Plan, link to the Office the State Engineer's website at <http://www.ose.state.nm.us/>. 🏠

## New Website to Provide Information on the Drought

For information on the Governor's Drought Task Force activities as well as links to drought forecasts and drought conditions reports around New Mexico, visit <http://www.ose.state.nm.us/DroughtTaskForce/conditions.html>. 🏠

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## Mortgage Rates At 40-Year Low

Recent news articles on increasing interest rates and a falloff in refinancing may have you thinking you've missed the boat if you haven't refinanced or taken advantage of lower home mortgage rates through the purchase of a new home in the last few years.

That's definitely not the case. Although rates may have edged up a little, they are still near the lowest in decades. Based on data from the Federal Housing Finance Board, mortgage rates in 2003 averaged the lowest since 1965.

Many homeowners can still remember when 30-year, fixed-rate mortgages were at 14% and 16% and a 12% mortgage was considered a bargain. While there's nothing in the foreseeable future to expect rates

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## Negotiating the Sale or Purchase of a Home

Few financial transactions in our lives are as important – or emotional – as buying or selling a home. Oftentimes the biggest hurdle is reaching agreement on the price and sale terms, and this requires negotiating.

Negotiations begin when someone interested in buying a home makes an offer of price and suggested terms to the seller. The seller can either accept the offer outright, reject it and not counter with another offer, or make a counteroffer back to the buyer. This continues until the two parties reach mutual agreement, or decide to end the negotiations.

Price is often just the start of the sales negotiations. The real negotiating typically comes down to the terms of the sale. Terms can involve

contingencies that must be resolved, such as financial arrangements, inspections, transaction timing and necessary repairs. As necessary as contingencies may be, buyers who offer sellers "clean" deals – offers without many contingencies – stand a better chance of having their offers accepted and deals successfully closed.

If you are in the market to buy a home, some tips to make your offer more attractive include:

- Get pre-approved for a loan amount and be able to prove it with a letter from your lender.
- Don't make your offer contingent upon your current home's sale. Either negotiate a bridge loan, sell your current home prior to mak-

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# Getting the Mo\$T Out of Your Home Appraisal

Whether you're selling or refinancing, you'll want the best price possible on the appraisal of your property. An appraisal assures the lender who is financing the loan that the property is worth the selling or refinance price. While all appraisals must conform to guidelines set by the Federal Reserve, ultimately every appraisal is a subjective analysis of a property's current market value.

The actual appraisal will consist of an inspection of your home's condition, features and square footage. The appraiser will analyze market data, including both historic and current sales of comparable homes in your area, current pricing and pending sales. Often appraisers

will photograph the home's exterior for their appraisal report and include a "street scene" to show the neighborhood atmosphere. Some appraisers will also want to photograph the interior of your home.

To help your home make a positive impression on the appraiser, you want to prepare much as if you were selling your home:

- Before the appraisal, check your home inside and out for signs of neglect or deferred maintenance such as chipped or peeling paint, damaged carpeting or flooring, ceiling leaks, broken fixtures or appliances, and make repairs. You may want to have a home inspection done to identify any needed repairs or maintenance.

- Take an objective look at your home from the street. How is its "curb appeal"? Clean up any clutter or junk outside the house, and spruce up the lawn, shrubs and gardens.
- If possible, keep children and pets out of sight during the appraisal, and make sure that your house smells fresh and clean.
- Accompany the appraiser on his tour of the house to answer questions and point out special features. You may also want to note any appliances or furniture that will be included in the sale.
- Busy appraisers often inspect three or more homes every day. You can help them remember the details of your home by preparing a written list of your home's features. Be sure to note any upgrades, improvements or additions that you have made to the house.
- If you have information on recent home sales prices in your neighborhood, give this to the appraiser.

Sometimes an appraisal will come in below your expectations. If so, you may be able to ask your lender for a review of the current appraisal, or a completely new appraisal by a different appraiser. If you still feel dissatisfied and feel you have a valid case, you can lodge a complaint with the appraisal licensing or regulatory board in your state. ■

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## Negotiate the Sale

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ing an offer on another home, or arrange for enough money to be available without your current home's sale. Sellers don't want to wait until your home sells.

- Be flexible – if the deal hinges on minor changes to price and terms, consider making them.
- Understand the sellers and their situation – try to find out why they are selling their home, what terms they're looking for, the lowest price they'd be willing to accept, and whether others have shown an interest in the home.
- Be ready to move quickly when you find a house that you want. If you see value in the home, chances are others will too.
- Stay in constant contact with your Realtor® – negotiations can happen at any time, including when you're out of town on business, nights and weekends. Always leave a number where you can be reached.

If you are planning on selling

your home, consider the following to improve your chances of a successful sale:

- Get your home in prime shape. Do any necessary repair work upfront so that your home is in "move-in" condition and buyers will not make contingencies based on the completion of a needed repair.
- If your home may have problems, have an inspection made in advance of listing it for sale and fix problems that could become deal stoppers.
- Set an appropriate price for your home right from the start so you don't waste time negotiating offers that are too low or fail in the end to give you the price you need.
- Try to avoid selling situations where you are under pressure to close by a certain time. Work with your Realtor to establish contingencies in the event your home doesn't sell as fast as you might like.
- Be flexible – just as with a buyer, it's important to keep your ultimate goal in mind. ■

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## Mortgage Rates

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to return to those levels anytime soon, there's no predicting what the years to come will bring.

Near term, long-term mortgage interest rates are projected to rise slightly throughout 2004, reaching 6.5% by the end of the year. With minimal upward pressure on interest rates, 2004 looks to be a favorable year for housing and mortgage markets. ■

# Winter Can Bring Indoor Air Problems

Indoor air quality tends to suffer during the winter months when your home is closed up against winter's cold and also against fresh air. In addition to the build-up of year-around pollutants, such as tobacco smoke or cleaning products, combustion gases from heating and cooking appliances can add to indoor air problems.

Unvented kerosene and gas space heaters, woodstoves, fireplaces, and gas stoves release carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, and particles. Unvented kerosene heaters may also generate acid aerosols. Combustion gases and particles also come from chimneys and flues that are improperly installed or maintained and cracked furnace heat exchangers. Pollutants from fireplaces and woodstoves with no dedicated outdoor air supply can be "back-drafted" from the chimney into the living space, particularly in weatherized homes.

The first step to avoid problems from indoor air pollution is to install a carbon monoxide detector to make certain accumulations of carbon monoxide do not turn fatal. Better CO<sub>2</sub> detectors have read-out panels that show how high carbon monoxide may have reached over a time period, allowing you to monitor levels.

To minimize combustion gases in your home:

- Follow the manufacturer's directions when operating fuel-burning unvented space heaters, especially directions on proper fuel and keeping the heater properly adjusted. While a space heater is in use, open a door from the room where the heater is to the rest of the house and open a window slightly.

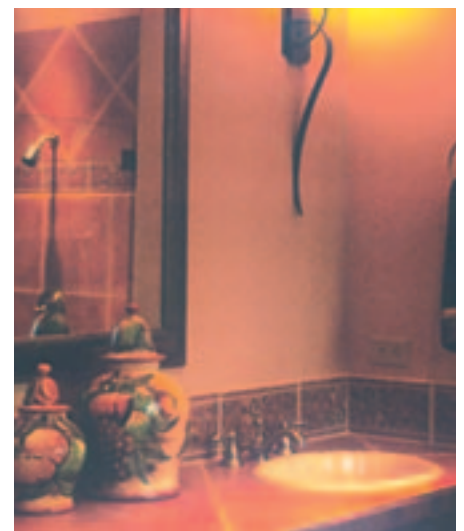


- Install and use exhaust fans over gas cooking stoves and ranges and keep the burners properly adjusted.
- Always make certain the flue in your gas fireplace is open when the fireplace is in use.
- Keep woodstove emissions to a minimum by installing properly sized stoves certified as meeting EPA emission standards. Use aged or cured (dried) wood only and follow the manufacturer's directions for starting, stoking, and putting out the fire in woodstoves.
- Have furnaces, flues, and chimneys inspected annually and properly repair cracks or damaged parts. Follow all service and maintenance procedures recommended by the manufacturer, including those that tell you how frequently to change the filter.
- Never operate combustion vehicles, such as cars, snow blowers, snowmobiles or lawn mowers, in an enclosed garage. Carbon monoxide can build up rapidly in an enclosed space, reaching hazardous levels within the garage and spreading into your home. 🏠

# Remodel for the Future

If you anticipate staying in your home for many years to come, you might want to incorporate features in remodeling projects that accommodate aging joints. Some common features that allow residents to live in their homes longer and facilitate daily activities such as bathing, cooking or climbing stairs include:

- A full bath on the entry level.
- Main bedroom on the first floor, allowing for possible one-level living.
- Wider doors and hallways, making the home more accessible to residents of all ages.
- At least one entry without steps for easier access.
- Bigger bathrooms to make maneuvering easier for people with walkers, crutches and wheelchairs or a caregiver, with features such as grab bars to help prevent falls.
- Multiple light switch controls to limit the number of trips needed to turn lights on and off.
- Lever door handles, raised electrical outlets, slightly lower electrical switches and thermostats with large, easy-to-read numbers. 🏠



*Lever faucet handles are easier for individuals with arthritis to use than knobs that need to be twisted on and off.*