

## **Commissioners oppose water plan; Beard calls proposal 'devastating'**

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By Gail Diane Yovanovich / Senior Staff Writer

Brewster County Commissioners adopted a resolution Monday opposing a plan to mine water from state-owned land in Far West Texas for use downstream. Rio Nuevo, Ltd., a private, for-profit limited partnership, plans to extract water from underground reservoirs on state-owned property in Brewster, Presidio, Jeff Davis, Hudspeth and Culberson counties and pump it into the Rio Grande River for transport to the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

General Land Office Commissioner Jerry Patterson granted preliminary approval for the Midland-area based company to submit a proposal. County Judge Val Beard told the Avalanche that most private land in Far West Texas is "checkerboarded" by state-owned property managed by GLO. Consequently, pumping from underground reservoirs on state property would also drain water from surrounding private sections.

"This takes the value of surrounding land to nothing," said Beard. "It will put ranchers out of business and make the land uninhabitable. Ranch and recreational lands would be virtually worthless."

Although Rio Nuevo claims the project would benefit Texas schools, Beard called it "a direct assault on our tax base." She added, "Instead of helping school children in Far West Texas, it would hurt the tax base of the school districts and the counties. It would be devastating."

Adding to economic and tax concerns, the environmental impact of pumping underground water into an open river and transporting it hundreds of miles downstream has not been examined.

Beard further called the process "wasteful," and said some scenarios show water loss through evaporation as high as 90 percent.

She noted that Rio Nuevo has been careful to keep its plans low key and has adopted the position that local water districts need not be consulted. Beard credited State Sen. Frank Madla with alerting locals governments to the project and urged concerned citizens to contact his office and the GLO to voice opposition to the proposal.

"I suspect there will be a delegation of Far West Texas water people going to the GLO shortly to express our concern," Beard said, "and I hope they'll be able to carry this [the court's resolution] with them, along with many others."

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