

Early in 2001, water engineer Steve Harris announced that Vallecito Water Company would start construction on a rural water system that year. It didn't happen.

On Tuesday he and Dick Lunceford gave an update to the county commissioners on VWC's successor, the La Plata/ Archuleta Water District.

Voters within the LAPLAWD service area narrowly approved creating the district last August. Harris and Lunceford announced plans to get more specific information to eligible district voters this year, in hopes of getting approval in November to begin collecting property taxes.

Lunceford led the citizens task force that brought district formation to the vote last summer, and he chairs the district board of directors.

Harris has been involved with efforts to create a rural water system since the mid 1990s, initially through the Pine River Irrigation District.

"How many times have we been here talking about this water system?" Harris asked.

Lunceford said, "When the district was formed, we were a little overwhelmed with the work that needed to be done." They are in "final stages" of gathering the information to present to voters on the source of water for the system, where the treatment plant will be, and what parts of the service area will get service first.

The board plans to start public information meetings in March and continue those for four or five months leading to the election, Lunceford said.

Harris added, "Over the next six months we hope to put together a master plan. We have a half dozen potential water sources" with three diversion points on the Animas, two on the Pine River, and one on the Piedra River.

Lunceford clarified to the Times that those are the district's water rights. Other potential sources are the Animas/ La Plata project, and leasing from PRID or the PRID voluntary shareholders pool formed to provide water to a rural system.

“The plan will show the first, second, and third priority for water sources, and the pipeline system,” Harris said. “We hope to have the plan done in August. It will be used to go through the county permit process, the (Corps of Engineers) 404 permit, the (state) health department permit for the treatment plant, and to answer questions for the election.”

Lunceford reported the district has applied for and gotten grants totaling more than \$150,000. It has grant applications pending with the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, Colorado Department of Health and Environment, and other agencies, he said.

The district budget will be posted on the district’s web site ([www.laplawd.org](http://www.laplawd.org)) by Jan. 30.

County Manager Shawn Nau noted the county is starting the redo of its 2001 comprehensive plan. Water supply will be one of the topics. He encouraged collaboration between LAPLAWD and the county to come up with plans that match.

County Commissioner Wally White raised the issue of getting water line rights of way across Southern Ute Tribal land.

Lunceford said the board intends to talk to the tribe when they have a more specific proposal for the system. He said some treatment plant locations could be affected by tribal right of way issues.

Harris said, “We will probably have to maximize right of way that doesn’t involve tribal land.”

White noted the large part of the district service area within Southern Ute reservation boundaries and said, “I’d encourage you to get after it sooner rather than later.”

County attorney Sheryl Rogers advised district representatives to meet with her and Nau about rights of way along county roads. “On some we don’t have authority to grant rights of way where it crosses tribal land,” she said.

White agreed. “Everything within the exterior (reservation) boundaries, we don’t necessarily have the ability to assign right of way there.”

County Commissioner Joelle Riddle wondered if there will be enough time to get information to voters if August is the target for the district's master plan.

The intent is to start public information meetings probably in March, Lunceford said. All the water source alternatives and facts related to each alternative will be presented at those meetings, he told the Times.

Public input will be one of the factors considered when the board decides on the water source, he said. "We really want the public to come out and voice their opinion."

The district service area goes east to the Archuleta County line, south to the state line, west to the Animas River, and several miles north of Highway 160.

It excludes growth areas claimed by Bayfield, Ignacio, and Durango, rural subdivisions that already have water systems, and more than 500 properties that petitioned for exclusion before the district was formed.

The service plan created by district proponents assumed a property tax of 5 mills to make the district financially viable. Lunceford said around 80 percent of district assessed valuation is gas industry-related. Eleven companies out of 30 stayed in the district. BP and XTO have the largest valuations among those that stayed in.

The system will be built in stages over 15 to 20 years, with bulk water stations for areas that get service later.

The service plan is based on total system construction costs of \$85 million. Lunceford said last summer that the construction cost analysis needed to be updated.

Lunceford also said then, "At the end of the build-out, most of the mill levy will go away, to around .5 mills."

The LAPLAWD board meets the second Thursday each month at 2 p.m. at the Oxford Grange. Besides Lunceford, board members are Dan Lynn, Patty Dressel, Gregg Johnson, and Bob Beebe.