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Emergency Drought Water Agreement Approved by Interstate Stream Commission

(ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico) -- An emergency drought water agreement approved by the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission today will help provide adequate water supplies during the upcoming summer months for the City of Santa Fe as well as the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District -- from Cochiti to Socorro.

The agreement will help alleviate the effects of the ongoing drought in the summer of 2003 and in subsequent years, while providing water to sustain endangered species like the silvery minnow.

"This agreement will help ensure that New Mexico farmers and other water users like the City of Santa Fe have adequate supplies, while still having enough to meet federal requirements for endangered species," said New Mexico State Engineer John D'Antonio. "The interests and needs of Native American Tribes as well as other Middle Rio Grande stakeholders will also be protected."

"We believe this agreement will help balance the interests of water users in New Mexico," said Interstate Stream Commission Director Estevan Lopez. "After the agreement is signed, then it will be up to the State of Texas to agree to accept the credits offered for relinquishment by the State of New Mexico."

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In addition to approval by the Interstate Stream Commission and the New Mexico State Engineer, the agreement must also be approved by the New Mexico Attorney General, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

"This agreement represents our continuing commitment to finding cooperative solutions that will help get us through this ongoing drought," said Attorney General Patricia A. Madrid. "While the agreement is contingent upon Texas accepting New Mexico's compact credit water, I think it is beneficial to both states. Farmers above and below Elephant Butte Reservoir, in both New Mexico and Texas, the cities of Santa Fe and El Paso, and the endangered species all stand to benefit."

The agreement will govern the use of up to 217,500 acre-feet of water to be captured and stored over the next three years. Capture and storage of the water will be possible if Texas accepts the offer to relinquish 217,500 acre-feet of Rio Grande Compact credit water, currently stored in Elephant Butte Reservoir. About 140,000 acre-feet will be allocated to Middle Rio Grande region farmers, and 7,500 acre-feet will be stored by the City of Santa Fe for future use. In 2003, New Mexico water users could store and use about 50,000 acre-feet, and federal agencies could use about 30,000 acre-feet to meet endangered species obligations. In future years, the amount of acre-feet for endangered species would drop to 20,000. The federal government will pay New Mexico \$100 per acre-foot for this water.

The Office of the State Engineer and the Interstate Stream Commission are separate but companion agencies charged with administering the state's water resources. The agencies have power over the supervision, measurement, appropriation and distribution of almost all surface and ground water in New Mexico, including streams and rivers that cross state boundaries. The State Engineer is also Secretary of the Interstate Stream Commission and oversees the staff of both agencies.

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