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New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission Approves Colfax Regional Water Plan

(SANTA FE, New Mexico) – In an effort to plan for drought conditions that are predicted to continue in future years across the State of New Mexico, the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission today announced the acceptance of the completed **Colfax Regional Water Plan**.

Governor Bill Richardson's Office has directed the Interstate Stream Commission to have a comprehensive statewide water plan in place by the end of 2003. The Interstate Stream Commission has worked for several years with all regions of the state to prepare their own regional water plans. The **Colfax Regional Water Plan** is the fifth plan to be completed. Once regional water plans are completed, they must be reviewed by the Interstate Stream Commission staff and must be accepted by the Interstate Stream Commission before they can be integrated into the comprehensive statewide water plan.

"New Mexico has been in a drought for the past four years, and conditions may continue for several years to come. We must – as a state – work together to prepare for that," said New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission Director Estevan Lopez. "It is important to balance the needs of all water users in the state. It is equally important that communities, businesses, and interested citizens have input into their regional plans."

To date, regional water plans were accepted for the Lower Pecos Valley, Lea County, Tularosa-Sacramento Salt Basin, and the Estancia Basin. The Interstate Stream Commission hopes to complete 10 of 16 regional plans by December 2003, so public input can be built into the state water plan.

(MORE)

The region is located in northern New Mexico in the Canadian River Basin, south of the Colorado border.

The **Colfax Regional Water Plan** was compiled by the Colfax Regional Water Plan Steering Committee, which is comprised of the following groups: members of the Colfax County Commission, the Village of Angel Fire, the Village of Cimarron, the Town of Springer, the City of Raton, the Raton Water Works, the Miami Mutual Domestic Water Users, the Colfax Soil and Water Conservation District, the C.S. Cattle Company, the Pittsburg & Midway Coal Company, the Philmont Scout Ranch, the Cimarron Water Master from the Office of the State Engineer, the New Mexico Environment Department, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the Vermejo Park Ranch, and several ranchers at large.

The plan resulted from a series of public meetings and focus group meetings. Two grants for \$337,000 from the Interstate Stream Commission along with other contributions funded the effort.

About 95 percent of the water supply used in Colfax County is surface water. Most all water rights are adjudicated. There are numerous small lakes and reservoirs in the region, the largest of which is Eagle Nest Reservoir. Current demand is more than 59,000 acre-feet per year. Projected demand for all water users in the region by the year 2040 is between 70,000 acre-feet and 150,000 acre-feet per year.

The **Colfax Regional Water Plan** focused on the following alternatives: drought planning, more efficient delivery of agricultural water, and watershed improvement. The plan also recommended hiring a county water planning coordinator, studies on improving storage capacity, and more public education about water issues.

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 to the Interstate Stream Commission and oversees the staff of both agencies.

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