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Officials Tour Recently Completed Facility for Breeding the Rio Grande Silvery Minnow in Albuquerque

(ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico) – Silvery minnow will live and thrive in new \$1.7 million state-of-the-art facility designed for breeding and rearing the fish in captivity. The Albuquerque facility, called a “refugium,” was toured by federal, state, and city officials today.

“Silvery minnow populations have been in decline in recent years. This facility will help protect the Rio Grande silvery minnow from extinction by providing a place for the fish to spawn and grow in an environment that closely resembles its natural habitat,” said Albuquerque Mayor Martin Chavez. “When the fish are mature enough to survive on their own, they will be reintroduced into the wild.”

Officials touring the facility included: Governor Bill Richardson, Albuquerque Mayor Martin Chavez, New Mexico State Engineer John D’Antonio, Interstate Stream Commission Director Estevan Lopez, Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner John Keys, as well as representatives from Senator Pete Domenici’s, Senator Jeff Bingaman’s, and Congresswoman Heather Wilson’s offices, and officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and others.

Phase One of the project was funded jointly by the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission and the City of Albuquerque at a cost of \$1.1 million, which included design and construction of the building and catchment ponds, as well as the operation and maintenance costs for one year.

Phase Two of the project will be funded by federal grants from Bureau of Reclamation at a cost of \$640,000, which will add 12 holding tanks, lab space, and netting for predator control. The City of Albuquerque Biological Park provided the land to host the facility as well as staff to manage and operate it. In addition, the City of Albuquerque obtained a \$300,000 Challenge Grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, by using the funds provided by the Interstate Stream Commission as matching funds.

"Because of the lack of leadership, it is unfortunate that the debate has pitted fish against humans," said New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson. "The hope of this venture is to breed the silvery minnow off the endangered species list outside of the Rio Grande environment ending the potential of a federal takeover of New Mexico's water."

"The New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission developed the conceptual idea for this facility in 1998. We entered into an agreement with the City of Albuquerque to build and operate this facility. Thanks to federal funding for the facility supported by Senator Pete Domenici, it is now a reality," said Interstate Stream Commission Director Estevan Lopez.

"New Mexicans are aware of the intense pressure we're under to find the right balance on the Rio Grande. This minnow refuge is one example of a cooperative endeavor that can help relieve some of that pressure and ensure that we can meet the water needs of our communities, farmers, and the minnow. I am proud to have provided funding for this project," said U.S. Senator Pete Domenici, who is chairman of the Senate appropriation subcommittee that funds the Bureau of Reclamation. Domenici broke ground for the project last July.

"This state-of-art refugium will play an important role in aiding in the survival of the endangered silvery minnow, which will help bring more certainty to New Mexico's water users. I'm pleased the federal government will commit federal funds to this project, and I will continue to work to ensure the refugium has the support it needs," said Bingaman, the top Democrat on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. "The success of this facility is a model for further cooperation between the state, the local community, and the federal government."

"Reclamation is pleased to provide financial support for the refugium. The refugium is one more example of the collaboration among agencies that are implementing numerous activities to preserve and protect the minnow," said Area Bureau Manager Ken Maxey.

"The Interstate Stream Commission and the City of Albuquerque volunteered to build this facility, which will help federal agencies meet their responsibilities to protect the minnow under the Endangered Species Act," said Dale Hall, Regional Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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.

The Bureau of Reclamation is the largest wholesale water supplier and the second largest producer of hydroelectric power in the United States, with operations and facilities in the 17 Western States. Its facilities also provide substantial flood control, recreation, and fish and wildlife benefits.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The agency administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat, and distributes millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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