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NEW MEXICO STATE ENGINEER ISSUES A GROUNDWATER PERMIT TO BENEFIT DOÑA ANA COUNTY

(SANTA FE, New Mexico) – The New Mexico State Engineer issued a permit on December 30, 2003 to the Crowder Bankruptcy Trustee, which provides for the conveyance of rights from the trustee to Doña Ana County and the Verde Group.

The permittees will be able to place up to 18,973 acre-feet of water a year to beneficial use. Under terms of the bankruptcy settlement, the Texas-based Verde Group will co-own the permit with Doña Ana County. Doña Ana County will have enough water to meet the expected need of the Verde Group's development in Santa Teresa, as well as other development in the area. The settlement also gives the City of Sunland Park an option to acquire 4,000 acre-feet of the permit.

"The permit provides for the development of groundwater while protecting the Rio Grande surface supply and surface water rights acquired by the permittees to offset any new depletions to prevent impairment to existing Rio Grande surface water rights," said New Mexico State Engineer John D'Antonio.

"This is a win-win agreement for all parties which closes a decade-long water rights dispute in southern New Mexico," said D'Antonio. "It provides much needed water for the future for Santa Teresa, for Sunland Park, and for Doña Ana County. It will be a catalyst for opening the door to economic development in area."

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D'Antonio said that the science, technology, and a better understanding of hydrology led him to conclude that he could issue the permit only if the permittee would agree to the conditions necessary to protect existing senior surface water rights.

The total maximum water right that can be established is 26,473 acre-feet per year.

The Office of the State Engineer is charged with administering the state's water resources. The State Engineer has power over the supervision, measurement, appropriation, and distribution of all surface and groundwater in New Mexico, including streams and rivers that cross state boundaries. The State Engineer is also Secretary of the Interstate Stream Commission and oversees its staff.

The Interstate Stream Commission is charged with separate duties including protecting New Mexico's right to water under eight interstate stream compacts, ensuring the state complies with each of those compacts, as well as water planning.

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