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## **Abundant Summer Recreational Opportunities Still Will Exist in New Mexico Despite Continued Drought and Low Reservoir Levels**

**(ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico)** – Recreational opportunities still will be plentiful in New Mexico this summer, despite low reservoir levels and estimates of lower than average snowpack runoff this spring in many parts of the state.

Alternatives to address persistent drought conditions were presented at a joint news conference at Albuquerque's Rio Grande Nature Center today with state officials present including: State Engineer John D'Antonio, Secretary of Tourism Fred Peralta, and State Parks Division Director David Simon.

"State agencies are working together to plan for continuing drought conditions. We felt it was important to deliver this message now, so recreational enthusiasts and recreation-based businesses can prepare," said John D'Antonio. "Although reservoir levels are down and snowpack levels are lower than usual for this time of year, we are still predicting a recreational season this summer, especially at Elephant Butte, Navajo Lake, Abiquiu, and Ute Lake. At Elephant Butte, this means recreational enthusiasts need to know that opportunities for boating, fishing, and water skiing will be optimal between Memorial Day and Fourth of July. By Labor Day, we are predicting water in the reservoir to be at very low levels."

"Our agency already has taken steps to maximize flow into our state's largest reservoir Elephant Butte, by constructing the Pilot Channel, an 18-mile-long constructed river channel through the old reservoir delta. This effort has cost our agency more than \$5 million to date to make sure water flow is unobstructed coming into the reservoir," said D'Antonio. "Additionally, the water level in Abiquiu Reservoir is expected to be higher than the past two years, while Ute Reservoir levels should be stable."

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The New Mexico State Parks Division continues to take steps to ensure park visitors have access to lakeshores, marinas and boat ramps. As water levels drop, work continues to extend and improve existing boat ramps and to extend access roads to shorelines and marinas.

"Contrary to some gloomy reports, our lakes are not going dry. Far from it," Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Secretary Joanna Prukop said. "Optimistic runoff forecasts indicate that at least three boat ramps at Elephant Butte will be operational through June. Farther north, Navajo and Ute lakes are expected to remain at least 75 percent full through the summer -- and Heron, El Vado and Conchas lakes should have plenty of recreational water through springtime and into early summer."

State Parks spent more than \$800,000 to improve boat ramps at Elephant Butte Lake, Heron Lake, and Navajo Lake since January 2003, Prukop said. This year, the division plans to spend another \$600,000 on ramps at Elephant Butte, Eagle Nest Lake and Conchas Lake. That includes \$400,000 at Conchas and \$30,000 to build a brand new ramp at Eagle Nest. The division also is working with marina operators at Elephant Butte Lake to move their operations to deeper water if necessary, she said.

"We are working hard to make sure our lakes and the businesses they support are accessible to the visitors that mean so much to the economies of neighboring communities," Prukop said.

"Although water sports are clearly some of New Mexico's more popular summer recreational pursuits, the state offers so much more," said Tourism Department Secretary Fred Peralta. "With its rich mixture of natural resources and diverse landscapes, New Mexico is still a perfect vacation escape for families and friends, for adventure, sports and recreation: hiking, mountain biking, golf, fly fishing, spelunking, ballooning, sailing, hang gliding, cultural attractions, national monuments, museums - the list is endless. Also, rafting opportunities should exist in the Rio Grande Box and on the Rio Chama below El Vado in May and June."

"Also, state irrigators are already aware, based upon their experiences over the past several years, that this drought is severe," said D'Antonio. "Unfortunately, based upon the most recent snowmelt runoff estimates, it appears a drought will continue in most areas of the state this irrigation season with several areas running short of water after the peak snowmelt runoff. For example, in the Middle Rio Grande Basin, the farmers need to know that the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District's maximum storage release this year is less than one-third of a full storage release supply and because of that, the District's irrigation season could end early again this 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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*(Note: Reservoir images are available at [www.nmparks.com](http://www.nmparks.com))*