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New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission Continues to Negotiate Land and Water Purchases in the Pecos River Basin

(SANTA FE, New Mexico) – The New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission has received more than 160 bids from landowners offering to sell more than 27,000 acres of land and associated water rights in the lower Pecos River Basin under the state’s water and farmland acquisition program.

Commission staff evaluated the bids considering the criteria set forth in the statute that authorizes the purchase program and entered into negotiations with the prospective sellers to promote the objectives of the program.

As of today, the state has entered into nine lease agreements that contain an option to purchase the land and water rights associated with about 2,000 irrigated acres. Negotiations are ongoing with 14 additional potential sellers, and Commission staff will continue to evaluate about 145 additional bids.

“A variety of factors can impact the purchase price,” said Interstate Stream Commission Director Estevan López. “For example, prices vary depending on whether the water right is junior or senior, whether the water right is a surface or groundwater right, the percentage of historical use, and the location of the water right.”

“Negotiations with landowners continue,” said López. “The Commission established general pricing guidelines. State statute requires us to make sure the offers are competitive in order to optimize the expenditure of state’s resources and conserve taxpayer dollars with the ultimate goal of increasing flows in the Pecos River.”

(MORE)

The acquisition program was first proposed in 2002 by the Lower Pecos River Basin Committee, an organization comprised of local stakeholders along the lower Pecos River, including irrigation districts, county and municipal governments, and business representatives, and was authorized by House Bill 417, which was approved during the 2002 State Legislative Session. The legislation authorizes the Interstate Stream Commission to purchase up to 6,000 acres of land and water rights in Carlsbad Irrigation District (CID) and up to 12,000 acres of land and water rights above Brantley Dam, which includes the Pecos Valley Artesian Conservancy District (PVACD) and the Ft. Sumner Irrigation District (FSID).

The acquisition program is one component of a long-term Consensus Plan devised by the Lower Pecos River Basin Committee as a means of insuring that New Mexico meets its interstate delivery obligation to the State of Texas under the Pecos River Compact.

The nine-member Interstate Stream Commission is responsible for compact compliance, investigating, conserving, protecting, and developing the water resources and stream systems of New Mexico as well as carrying out plans and programs for beneficial uses in the state. The Commission has water planning responsibility for the state.

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