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New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission Accepts the Lower Rio Grande Regional Water Plan

(SANTA FE, New Mexico) – In an effort to plan for an adequate water supply in relation to projected demand in a specific region of the state -- including during drought conditions that have been experienced across the State of New Mexico over the last several years -- the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission yesterday accepted the completed **Lower Rio Grande Regional Water Plan**.

Governor Bill Richardson's Office directed the Interstate Stream Commission to have a comprehensive statewide water plan in place by the end of 2003. The Commission was able to meet that objective. In addition, the Commission has worked for many years with all regions of the state to prepare their own regional water plans. 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.

"Even though the State Water Plan already is completed, it is important to finish individual regional water plans. These regional water plans provide an opportunity to involve the public in developing water management, development, and conservation strategies within their regions," said New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission Director Estevan López. "New Mexico has been in a drought, and such conditions may continue for several years to come. The state must work with water users and interested citizens within a region to develop mechanisms for managing limited water resources. The state's regional water planning process provides a forum for water users, local governments, businesses, and interested citizens to have input into the development of the regional plan."

(MORE)

To date, the Interstate Stream Commission has accepted regional water plans for Colfax County, Jemez y Sangre, Lower Pecos Valley, Lea County, Tularosa-Sacramento and Salt Basins, the Estancia Basin, Socorro-Sierra, San Juan Basin, Northwest New Mexico Region, and the Middle Rio Grande.

The Lower Rio Grande water planning region is located in south central New Mexico in the Rio Grande Basin north of the Texas border. The Lower Rio Grande Regional Plan included input from representatives from the City of Las Cruces, Elephant Butte Irrigation District, New Mexico State University, Dona Ana County, Dona Ana Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Association, the Village of Mesilla, the Berino Mutual Domestic Water Consumers Association and the Village of Hatch.

Most of the water supply is used by agriculture and is stored in Elephant Butte Reservoir. Municipalities and other entities use groundwater, which is directly linked to the surface water system. The plan addresses projected demand for public water supply and other needs, which are expected to grow significantly due to rapidly growing municipal entities in the region.

The plan also addresses future challenges to managing water resources in the region including water conservation, reclaimed water watershed management, desalination, aquifer storage and recovery, capture of storm water, a surface water diversion and treatment system, and other options.

The plan was developed with a number of grants from the Interstate Stream Commission totaling more than \$437,000. The Lower Rio Grande Water Users Organization contributed matching funds and in-kind services.

The plan will be posted on the Office of the State Engineer's website located at: www.ose.state.nm.us

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 nine-member 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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