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Active Water Resource Management Rules and Regulations Are Finalized

(SANTA FE, New Mexico) – In response to continuing drought in New Mexico, general rules and regulations for administering Active Water Resource Management (AWRM) were finalized by the State Engineer on December 3, 2004. The drought highlights the need for the State Engineer to be actively engaged in the field to administer the actual use of water.

These statewide rules and regulations provide that, when necessary, junior water rights that would otherwise be curtailed will be able to temporarily acquire senior water rights from owners participating in the water rights marketplace in an expedited manner. The rules and regulations were made public in June and were revised as appropriate in response to public comments. The revised draft was made public at a meeting at the State Capitol Building in Santa Fe on October 13.

“These rules and regulations will provide us with the tools to move forward with priority administration,” said State Engineer John D’Antonio. “We are committed to taking proactive steps toward the management of all New Mexico rivers. Steps taken this year to develop Active Water Resource Management into a statewide program will help us to be ready for future drought cycles as well as enhance our progress to fully adjudicate and administer the state’s water rights.”

“We received a lot of positive public comments, and we considered all of them as we drafted the final rules and regulations,” said D’Antonio. “When we begin the task of creating basin-specific rules and regulations, it will also be a public process. We will hold public meetings, and input and involvement from all water rights owners will be encouraged.”

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AWRM refers to a broad range of activities, which include expediting the application transfer process, monitoring and metering diversions and limiting diversion of water to the amount authorized by existing water rights all within the prior appropriation system.

The State Engineer has already designated priority basin areas around the state, which include in order of priority: San Juan River Basin, Rio Chama, Lower Rio Grande, Nambe-Pojoaque-Tesuque Stream System, Rio Mimbres, Rio Gallinas, and the Lower Pecos Basin.

The State Engineer has organized teams to implement AWRM in the areas of critical concern across the state and is in the process of: designating basin managers; developing and implementing schedules for creating water master guidelines; establishing a realistic budget of metering costs, guidelines, and field implementation and enforcement; developing a plan for communication with the public; hiring a water master for each area of critical concern; and providing training for water masters and other personnel.

Copies of the final rules and regulations for Active Water Resource Management are available on the Office of the State Engineer's website 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 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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