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State Engineer Announces New Water Master District in the Upper Mimbres

(DEMING, New Mexico) – New Mexico State Engineer John D'Antonio signed an order on December 16, 2005, creating a new water master district in the Upper Mimbres region in Grant County in New Mexico.

The State Engineer declared the water master district for the administration of the water of the upper reach of the Mimbres River Stream System and adjacent portions of the Mimbres Underground Water Basin.

"The recent drought has produced a water shortage in the Upper Mimbres Stream System, creating a problem for the citizens of Grant County," said State Engineer John D'Antonio. "The declaration of the water master district was necessary to ensure the public safety of water users and protect existing water rights from impairment."

The declaration also provides for the appointment of a water master, who will be based in Deming, New Mexico.

"The permanent appointment of a water master in the district will guarantee the economical and satisfactory apportionment of water in the district," said Deming District Office Supervisor Charles "Tink" Jackson. "In addition, the day-to-day administration of the surface waters and groundwaters of the Upper Mimbres Water District will maximize water uses during low flow periods."

In 1993, the Luna County District Court in Deming, New Mexico, adjudicated the water rights in the Mimbres Underground Water Basin and the Mimbres River Stream System in 1993. Last month, the court declined the State Engineer's request for the court to relinquish jurisdiction over the administration of water rights on the Upper Mimbres River. On December 16, 2005, the State Engineer filed a motion asking the court to reconsider the ruling.

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The State Engineer views this declaration of the water master district as a solution to avoiding conflict during this lengthy period of drought. This action is part of the Active Water Resource Management (AWRM) initiative. 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 designated several high priority basin areas around the state, which include in order of priority: Lower Pecos Basin, Lower Rio Grande, San Juan River Basin, Rio Mimbres, Nambé-Pojoaque-Tesuque Stream System, Rio Chama, and the Rio Gallinas.

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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