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## **State Engineer Announces the Schedule for District-Specific Regulations for Active Water Resource Management of the Lower Rio Grande**

**(LAS CRUCES, New Mexico)** – New Mexico State Engineer John D’Antonio announced today the details of a public process that the Office of the State Engineer will use to develop district-specific rules and regulations to implement Active Water Resource Management (AWRM) in the Lower Rio Grande.

The State Engineer’s objectives for these Lower Rio Grande regulations and an outline of the public process as well as the schedule that his office will use to develop them are posted on the Office of the State Engineer website at: <http://www.ose.state.nm.us/ActiveWater>

“We are committed to taking proactive steps toward the management of all New Mexico rivers,” said State Engineer John D’Antonio. “I plan to implement district-specific regulations for Active Water Resource Management in the Lower Rio Grande in New Mexico by the end of 2005. Administration of water rights is necessary, given the continuing drought and very low reservoir storage levels in Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoirs. The Office of the State Engineer is actively working to make sure that limited water supplies are properly distributed and that water is not wasted.”

The State Engineer finalized general rules and regulations that provide a consistent, statewide framework for water use administration on December 31, 2004. The details of how AWRM will apply to water rights in the Lower Rio Grande will be spelled out in the Lower Rio Grande district-specific AWRM regulations to be developed in 2005.

During the public review of the general regulations, the State Engineer pledged that his office would hold extensive discussions with water users and provide many opportunities for public review and comment as district-specific regulations are developed for each of the highest priority geographic areas, where he is creating water master districts.

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"It is important to me that we involve area water users and residents in this process," said D'Antonio. "We will conduct several public meetings in Las Cruces to understand the public's concerns and to respond to their comments."

Implementation of AWRM in the Lower Rio Grande will address groundwater pumping but will not include oversight of the Elephant Butte Irrigation District's (EBID) distribution of surface water for irrigation to its constituents.

"That is EBID's responsibility, by law," said D'Antonio, "and I have no intention of duplicating that responsibility."

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

"I will implement priority administration only if area water right owners don't agree on a plan that I can accept for managing limited water supplies. Priority enforcement by my office is my last resort," said D'Antonio. "I am very pleased that the Lower Rio Grande Water Users Organization has told me they will develop such a plan for alternative administration."

A new water master district was created for the Lower Rio Grande in early December. A water master is expected to be hired in the next couple of months.

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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