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State Engineer Reports on Initial Meter Inspections in the Lower Rio Grande

(LAS CRUCES, New Mexico) – Reports on a two-week meter inspection in the Lower Rio Grande Water Master District indicates that more wells need to be metered – but people in the region are working to comply with the metering requirements.

State Engineer John D'Antonio and more than 30 employees from the Office of the State Engineer began the meter inspections in the Lower Rio Grande on Monday, March 6, 2006. Over the two-week period, Office of the State Engineer staff visited more than 3,200 wells in the basin -- out of that number, it was determined that 764 wells were metered.

"Although we were hoping to see more meters on wells, the inspections proved to be very successful because we were able to meet our objective," said State Engineer John D'Antonio. "We were able to get an idea of what needs to be done to ensure all wells in the district will be metered. In addition, well owners were able to speak with us first-hand to discuss what they need to do to come into compliance."

Only non-domestic and non-livestock wells were visited during the inspections. For those whose wells were examined, the State Engineer will be sending out a follow-up letter indicating what the next step is for the well owner.

"A sticker was left on every well we inspected," said Lower Rio Grande Water Master Sheldon Dorman. "If a meter was installed, the owner will receive an inspection report. If the well was not in compliance, the owner will receive notification that they need to install a meter as soon as possible."

The Office of the State Engineer anticipates that most of the district will be metered by 2007, before any possible enforcement action begins.

(MORE)

The State Engineer issued the metering order for groundwater wells in the Lower Rio Grande in December 2004. The order became effective March 1, 2006. Metering of all wells will allow the State Engineer to curtail illegal diversions and over-diversions and to enforce water right priorities, if necessary. Metering will also help the State Engineer manage and administer the stream system – especially during times of drought, promote the conservation of water, and prevent over-appropriation and waste.

The metering order is part of a long-term effort to allow New Mexico to control its own water destiny.

“Well metering is one of several tools the I am putting in place so that we can better manage our water,” said the State Engineer. “Our water rights can be protected only if we measure our use.”

The Office of the State Engineer has also granted permits to well owners with a metering condition. These individuals are in a different category than those affected by the metering order. Well owners who do not have meters under these circumstances are in violation of their permit and need to install meters immediately.

“More than 1,000 permits were issued by the Office of the State Engineer with a condition requiring that a meter be installed before the well is used,” said Dorman. “The message needs to get out that if these individuals do not have meters on their wells, they need to get them or they may be restricted from pumping water out of their wells.”

The State Engineer extends his appreciation to all well owners who already installed a meter prior to the inspections and to those who were courteous to Office of the State Engineer staff.

“We want to thank well owners who were understanding of the need to have their wells metered and for their prompt compliance to the metering requirement,” said the State Engineer.

For questions regarding the meter inspections or the metering requirements, please contact the Lower Rio Grande Water Master Sheldon Dorman, at (505) 524-6161 or (505) 649-1480. You can also visit the Office of the State Engineer website at www.ose.state.nm.us, where metering information can be accessed by clicking the link on the front page under “hot topics.”

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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