



For immediate release:

April 27, 2006

For more information, contact:

Karin Stangl, Planning and Communication Director  
Office of the State Engineer  
(505) 827-6139

## Op-Ed: State Engineer Will Continue to Push Forward With Well Metering Requirements in Lower Rio Grande

by John D'Antonio, PE, New Mexico State Engineer

(SANTA FE, New Mexico) – The task of metering water uses in the Lower Rio Grande has made tremendous strides this year. I thank everyone who has been part of this effort to enable New Mexico to control its water destiny.

In part, because of the progress we have made together, I have decided not to shut off any wells for non-compliance with the metering order during the 2006 irrigation season to allow people more time to purchase and install meters. However, this does not relieve anyone from the requirement to meter wells.

The metering order I issued in December 2004 is still in place as part of a long-term effort to allow New Mexico to protect and fully use its water. Metering in the Lower Rio Grande will help facilitate the management and administration of the stream system, especially during times of drought. Most importantly, it will allow the Office of the State Engineer to identify and curtail illegal pumping and to enforce water right priorities, if necessary. It will also provide the data required to quantify water use in the region and to protect New Mexico's water-right owners. Metering is already required in other critical areas of the state, such as the Carlsbad and Roswell Basins. The time has come for more measurement and control of water use in the Lower Rio Grande, and I am committed to this effort.

I want well owners to know what they can expect to see as we move forward with the metering initiative. To recap, the deadline for meter installation in the district was March 1, 2006. Shortly after the deadline, my staff and I began inspecting wells to ensure owners were in compliance with the metering requirement. From March 6 to March 17 of this year, agency staff visited about 3,279 wells in the Rincon Valley and the Mesilla Valley. Of those wells, 764 were metered.

The Lower Rio Grande Water Master intends to provide the owner of every inspected well with the results of the inspection. If a well was metered, 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.

(MORE)

I recognize that for some water users, the cost of the meters has been an obstacle to compliance with the metering order. To help address this problem, my staff is working with local entities to offer low-interest loans through the Interstate Stream Commission's Reloan Program. Through that program, irrigation and water districts, municipalities, political subdivisions, and acequias may borrow funds from the program and then reloan the money to those in need of assistance with the cost of purchasing meters. This program, together with the additional time I have allowed before pursuing enforcement, should make it possible to bring the Lower Rio Grande into compliance with the metering order with the least possible expense and inconvenience.

I want to assure water right owners that non-compliance with the metering order will not result in the loss of water rights, but may make water right owners subject to repayment of water and/or financial penalties in the future.

One metering issue apart from the metering order calls for immediate enforcement action. Some well owners are diverting groundwater under a permit that requires them to have a meter. If these well owners did not install a meter before diverting any water, as required by the permit, they are in violation of their permit. Throughout the meter inspections, Office of the State Engineer staff discovered that numerous permitted well owners did not have meters installed on their wells. These wells have been operating illegally from the moment water was first diverted. As such, owners of these unmetred wells are not subject to the time extension for metering and face immediate enforcement action.

I want to remind New Mexicans that we live in an arid state with a variable water supply and an ever-increasing demand for water. It is my responsibility as State Engineer to protect and preserve existing water rights, particularly during these times of severe drought.

If you still have questions about metering, please contact the Lower Rio Grande Water Master Sheldon Dorman, at (505) 524-6161 or (505) 649-1480. I also invite you to visit the Office of the State Engineer website at [www.ose.state.nm.us](http://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.

733 total words