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For more information, contact:

Karin Stangl, Planning and Communication Director
Office of the State Engineer/Interstate Stream Commission
(505) 699-4923

Maureen Haney, Public Relations Coordinator
Office of the State Engineer/Interstate Stream Commission
(505) 764-3864

Governor Richardson Announces San Juan Chama Project Agreement to Provide Water for Future New Mexicans



(SANTA FE, New Mexico) – Long-term contracts were signed today at the Roundhouse between the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and seven contractors to secure San Juan Chama Project water for future generations of New Mexicans.

The San Juan-Chama Project provides a total of 96,200 acre-feet of water to New Mexico annually. These contract conversions will solidify the delivery of 8,620 acre-feet of that water each year to the seven contractors. The contracts do not have an expiration date.

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"This is a major achievement in our efforts to create a more secure water future for New Mexico," said Governor Bill Richardson. "I compliment all of you that were involved in these negotiations. You have helped ensure a continued high quality of life for the citizens of the communities you serve. This is just the beginning of what I hope will be a productive Year of Water during the next legislative session. This milestone achievement is a fitting prologue to the bold programs and projects we will bring forward in the months ahead."

Officials attending the signing event included: Governor Bill Richardson, Interstate Stream Commission Director Estevan López, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Albuquerque Area Manager Connie Rupp, Santa Fe Mayor Dave Coss, Taos Mayor Bobby Duran, Española Mayor Joseph Maestas, Village of Taos Ski Valley Mayor Neal King, Los Alamos County Commission Chair Michael Wheeler, Santa Fe County Commission Chair Harry Montoya, Village of Los Lunas Administrator Phillip Jaramillo and other official representatives.

The signing of these contracts is an effort to obtain secure and long-lasting water supplies for the respective communities. The US Bureau of Reclamation has converted the original water service contracts for the San Juan Chama Project into repayment contracts with no expiration dates. This change comes at the request of the seven San Juan-Chama Project contractors: the City of Santa Fe, City of Española, Town of Taos, County of Santa Fe, County of Los Alamos, Village of Los Lunas, and Village of Taos Ski Valley.

The Interstate Stream Commission, which has been a cooperating agency for the environmental assessment on the contract conversions, strongly supports this amendment and change of the current contracts to provide a reliable source of water in these communities for future development.

In addition to helping facilitate growth for New Mexico, the San Juan-Chama contractors have also supported the Bureau of Reclamation's efforts to purchase water for the Rio Grande silvery minnow. Such water is essential to meet the requirements of the 2003 Biological Opinion and keep parts of the Rio Grande wet for the silvery minnow.

"The Bureau of Reclamation is pleased to see that the years of work and cooperation between all of the federal, state and local governments involved in this contract conversation process is now paying off," said Connie Rupp, Albuquerque Area Manager for the Bureau of Reclamation. "The changes in these seven contracts will give these San Juan-Chama contractors a firm water supply that will allow for more long-term water planning and growth."

"By converting a contract that used to have an expiration date with a permanent contract, this amendment is a major step in enhancing our water portfolio and securing the water necessary to support the Buckman Direct Diversion Project into the future," Mayor Dave Coss said.

"The new San Juan Chama water rights contract clears the way for the proposed Española's Surface Water Diversion and Treatment Project to provide water to the entire region for generations to come," said Española Mayor Joseph Maestas.

"This is a critical step in the Town of Taos' Water Plan in continuing to meet the Town's water needs," said Taos Mayor Bobby Duran.

"This contract conversion is important to Los Alamos as it assures the community's rights to 1200 acre-feet of Colorado River water," said Los Alamos County Council Chair Mike Wheeler. "This water, coupled with water conservation measures, provides Los Alamos County confidence that the future water needs of the county can be met."

The Village of Los Lunas has dedicated half of its allocation to providing a secure source of rights to commercial development.

"Although we have always held a portion of our allocation in reserve for economic development purposes," said Los Lunas Mayor Louis Huning. "This will provide more certainty to businesses who are considering locating in the Los Lunas area."

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"The Village of Taos Ski Valley is extremely happy to be signing this contract assuring our winter supply of water for all our winter guests and the residents of the Village," said Village of Taos Ski Valley Mayor Neal King.

More information about the contracts is available on the Bureau of Reclamation website at:
<http://www.usbr.gov/uc/albuq/envdocs/ea/sanjuanchama/index.html>

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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