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For more information, contact:

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

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

New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission Approves Golf Course on the Shores of Ute Lake

(SANTA FE, New Mexico) The New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission approved an agreement on November 2, 2006 that allows the resort community of Ute Lake Ranch to construct and operate a golf course on the shores of Ute Lake.

The project has had strong backing from Quay County area governments as a catalyst to kindle new economic growth in the region. The Commission's action serves a two-fold purpose of protecting water quality at Ute Reservoir while promoting economic development.

Ute Lake Ranch is building the golf course in association with a large-scale housing development project that is already in the works. Plans are underway for an initial nine-hole course within the boundaries of the Commission's existing flowage easement surrounding Ute Reservoir. A flowage easement is an area that allows the Interstate Stream Commission to flood property above lake level if necessary as part of dam operations or in the instance of natural flooding. This is a normal feature of a reservoir and the Interstate Stream Commission has a policy relating to construction or development within the flowage easement.

"Engineers and officials of Ute Lake Ranch development and Interstate Stream Commission staff worked long and hard on a development plan that balances the needs of the project and the responsibility of the Interstate Stream Commission to protect water quality in Ute Lake," said Interstate Stream Commission Director Estevan López.

This agreement with the Interstate Stream Commission obligates Ute Lake Ranch to monitor water quality conditions and to address any pollution that occurs as a result of golf course operations. A system of runoff collection drains and collection ponds will operate to intercept runoff from the golf course before it enters the reservoir. The contents of the ponds will be tested periodically to ensure that contaminants don't exceed standards for drinking water.

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The Interstate Stream Commission owns and operates Ute Reservoir, which contains water that will be available as a drinking water source for eastern New Mexico communities. U.S. Senators Pete Domenici and Jeff Bingaman recently introduced a bill in Congress to authorize construction of an eastern New Mexico rural pipeline project that will use water from Ute Reservoir.

"The communities around Ute Lake made clear to the Interstate Stream Commission that they need this development to help build their regional economy," López said. "The Commission concluded that the agreement presented succeeded in protecting water quality while enabling the development. The developers worked with staff to achieve that balance."

The nine-member Interstate Stream Commission is charged with duties, which include 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.

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.

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