



**For immediate release:**

April 12, 2007

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## **Interstate Stream Commission Breaks Ground for New Facility for Breeding the Rio Grande Silvery Minnow in Los Lunas**

**(LOS LUNAS, New Mexico)** – Rio Grande silvery minnow will live and thrive in \$1.2 million cutting edge facility designed for breeding and rearing the fish in captivity. Pueblo of Isleta Governor Robert Benevides performed a ground blessing ceremony, followed by the ground-breaking by the Interstate Stream Commission for the new facility, called a refugium.

"This facility will help with the recovery of the Rio Grande silvery minnow by providing a place for the fish to spawn and grow in an environment that closely resembles its natural habitat," said New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission Director Estevan López.

Officials attending the event included: Congresswoman Heather Wilson, Attorney General Gary King, New Mexico State Engineer John D'Antonio, Interstate Stream Commission Chairman Jim Dunlap, and Los Lunas Mayor Louis Huning, as well as representatives from Governor Bill Richardson's, Senator Pete Domenici's, Senator Jeff Bingaman's, and Congressman Steve Pearce's offices, and others.

"Balancing the water and ecological needs of the Rio Grande has required almost super human effort on the part of all the organizations that manage the river. Of particular importance is the partnership between the State and Federal agencies. Today is a historical moment, where we celebrate the State of New Mexico's investment in propagation and management of the Rio Grande Silvery Minnow, once one of the most abundant minnow species in the Rio Grande basin. I applaud the State's efforts and hope that we can continue along the path to balancing the water demands along the Rio Grande," said U.S. Senator Pete Domenici.

"The Rio Grande silvery minnow plays a key role in the river's ecosystem. The construction of this refugium is an important step in working towards the repopulation of this species," said U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman.

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"We don't have to choose between protecting species and the rights of people, including their water rights. This refugium is a step in that direction," says Rep. Heather Wilson. "I believe that the silvery minnow can be saved and its habitat preserved without encroaching on the water rights so critical to New Mexico's farmers, ranchers and cities."

"Village officials are thrilled with the refugium coming to our community and we look forward to welcoming people who will visit the facility. We also anticipate the facility will create additional economic opportunities in the Los Lunas area and perhaps bring new residents," said Los Lunas Mayor Louis F. Huning.

"This refugium is required as part of the March 2003 biological opinion on Middle Rio Grande water operations," said State Engineer and Water Trust Board Chairman John D'Antonio. "It was made possible by state funding, which included two grants from the Water Trust Board plus additional funding from the Interstate Stream Commission. Non-federal cost sharing was provided by the Endangered Species Collaborative Program for the design and construction costs."

The refugium is a unique design that mimics the Rio Grande and incorporates the different types of microhabitats that are needed for different components of the Rio Grande silvery minnow's life cycle. It will consist of a 10-foot wide by 400-foot-long outdoor "stream" that meanders at ground level over a linear distance of 300 feet. It will be fenced to prevent predation by birds, snakes, and other animals. There will be five 3-foot-deep ponds that are fed by the stream. Total water area covered by the stream and ponds is a quarter of an acre. There are low-lying vegetated areas next to the pond and the stream that can be flooded to stimulate spawning, without the use of hormones and produce a habitat for eggs and newly hatched fish. Total water volume in the refugium will be about half an acre-foot or 162,000 gallons. Water will be recycled but will not be treated, except to remove debris such as leaves.

The indoor hatchery will be a 50-foot by 30-foot building that will house 24 40-gallon aquaria that will be used to spawn minnows, as well as five 680-gallon and eight 280-gallon tanks that will be used to hold brood fish.

Construction will begin in April and is scheduled to be completed in late fall. Fish will be stocked in November, and these fish will spawn in the spring of 2008. Once on-line, the Los Lunas Silvery Minnow Refugium will become the fourth breeding and production facility that propagates and raises Rio Grande silvery minnow in the state.

*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 nine-member 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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