



**For immediate release:**

February 1, 2008

**For more information, contact:**

Karin Stangl, Planning and Communication Director  
Planning and Communication Division  
(505) 699-4923

Maureen Haney, Public Relations Coordinator  
Planning and Communication Division  
(505) 764-3864

## **New Mexico Farmers Receive Additional Water for 2008 Irrigation Season**

**(ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico)** – The State of New Mexico has relinquished 125,000 acre-feet of accrued Rio Grande Compact credit water in Elephant Butte Reservoir to increase the supply of surface water available for use by New Mexico farmers downstream of the reservoir.

New Mexico's Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) requested the relinquishment in order to increase the initial river diversion allocation from about 265,000 acre-feet to about 380,000 acre-feet of water. This will provide farmers in the Rio Grande Valley below Caballo Dam with a more reliable supply of surface water at the beginning of the 2008 irrigation season.

"Relinquishing the water downstream will not only improve water supply below Elephant Butte Dam, but will also allow for more storage capacity in upstream reservoirs in future drought years," said Interstate Stream Commission Director Estevan López.

In those drought years, the relinquishment will also benefit the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD), the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the City of Santa Fe as part of the Emergency Drought Water Agreement, and provide a bit more water to aid Reclamation in meeting the flow targets of the 2003 Biological Opinion. Those targets provide specific flows in certain parts of the river to maintain the habitat of the Rio Grande silvery minnow.

"This relinquishment is occurring at a time when we have substantial snowpack in the northern mountains and the upstream reservoirs are nearly full," said State Engineer John D'Antonio, who is also the Rio Grande Compact Commissioner for New Mexico. "The full reservoirs in the north won't be able to store much snowmelt runoff this year which means most of it will flow into Elephant Butte."

**(MORE)**

The relinquishment will have little or no effect on the 2008 recreational season at Elephant Butte Reservoir. If average snowmelt runoff is received this year there will be little or no difference in Elephant Butte water levels for Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day holidays.

"With or without relinquishment, if runoff projections hold, it should be a great year at the Butte—as good or better than last year," said New Mexico State Park Director Dave Simon.

Snowpack levels in the northern portion of the Rio Grande basin are currently between 145-175 percent of average and the most recent projections by the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service indicate that the runoff should be average or better.

The Interstate Stream Commission currently has contractors working on a pilot channel in the dry portion of Elephant Butte Reservoir to optimize the flow of water into the reservoir.

*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.*

**# # #**