



For immediate release:

March 20, 2008

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Summer Recreational Opportunities Are Promising Based on Winter Snowpack and Runoff

(ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico) — As a result of substantial winter snowpack and spring runoff, reservoir levels statewide are projected to be good for recreational opportunities in New Mexico for Memorial Day and the Fourth of July.

A joint news conference was held today in Albuquerque with state officials attending including: State Engineer John D'Antonio, Deputy Secretary of Tourism Craig Swagerty, State Parks Division Director David Simon, and Bernalillo District Forester Todd Haines.

"Despite above average snowpack we can expect variable water conditions around the state this year," said State Engineer John D'Antonio. "On one hand we can expect optimal and prolonged rafting conditions as well as high reservoir levels on the San Juan and Rio Grande, however, the southern part of the state is still pretty dry and we need to be cautious of drought conditions and increased fire danger."

New Mexico has had one of the wettest years on record in the northern part of the state. For some of the river basins the March 1st snowmelt runoff forecast is the highest on record since the 1960s. In contrast the southern and southeastern parts of the state have been unusually dry with almost no rain or snow this year. The projected high runoff should mean a prolonged and exciting rafting recreation season in the northern part of the state. It is also good news for recreation on New Mexico's reservoirs. Despite this good news people need to be aware of potential flood damage from overflowing rivers and high fire danger in the southern parts of the state.

"State Park lakes are in excellent shape this season," said State Parks Division Director David Simon. "And since State Parks is celebrating its 75th Diamond Anniversary all year, this should be one of the best years ever to visit New Mexico State Parks."

During the past 75 years State Parks has evolved from a federal New Deal initiative in 1933 to a vibrant system of 34 parks serving more than 4 million people each year. To celebrate, State Parks in 2008 will offer a \$100 camping coupon booklet for \$75; a drawing for a 3-carat diamond bracelet; a Geocaching Challenge; Arts in the Parks and numerous special events. State Parks also begins the pilot phase of the Outdoor Classroom Program with the Public Education Department and the new PARxKS: Prescription for Health with the Department of Health.

(MORE)

In addition, visitors to State Parks will see many new features including: new visitor centers at Eagle Nest Lake State Park and Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park; opening of the new Cerrillos Hills/Galisteo Basin State Park; and a state-of-the-art, solar-powered comfort station at Percha Dam State Park. More information is available at www.nmparks.com."

"While we are optimistic New Mexico's water recreational opportunities will remain a mainstay of our spring and summer seasons, remember that the Land of Enchantment is 22 million acres of prairies, mountains and forests, offering every recreational pursuit imaginable," said Michael Cerletti, Secretary of the New Mexico Tourism Department. "New Mexico welcomes 25 million domestic visitors a year, who have added more than \$5 billion annually to the state's economy. This has been accomplished through partnerships - public and private - dedicated to overcoming challenges like record high prices at the pump, and working to expand tourism opportunities to every corner of the state."

While New Mexicans and other visitors are enjoying the state's natural resources, the New Mexico State Forestry Division would like them to remember to be safe when using campfire sites and open cooking areas. While early forecasts are calling for a less severe fire season in some parts of the state, extreme danger still remains in eastern and southern New Mexico. All precautions should be taken, such as clearing the area of all debris and brush from around the campfire or outdoor grill.

"We've already seen numerous fires across the state on private and public land this year," said New Mexico State Forester Arthur "Butch" Blazer. "I can't urge strongly enough that vacationers in our state be sure of any restrictions or rules on the use of fire in the area they plan to visit. While drought conditions have eased in many areas, there is still a lot of dry fuel out there that could catch fire very easily."

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.

New Mexico State Parks' mission is to protect and enhance natural resources, provide recreational facilities and opportunities, and promote public safety and education to benefit and enrich the lives of our visitors.

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