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Taos Regional Water Plan Accepted by the Interstate Stream Commission

(TAOS, New Mexico) – New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission Wednesday voted unanimously to accept the **Taos Regional Water Plan**, the final plan of 16 planning regions in New Mexico to come before the Commission for review.

“The completion of the final regional water plan marks a milestone in water planning in the state,” said Interstate Stream Commission Director Estevan López. “We now have plans for all of the state’s regions and can begin the process of integrating the regional water plans under the umbrella of the State Water Plan in the upcoming State Water Plan update. This will provide a foundation for effective and efficient water use and management statewide that also takes into account regional considerations.”

The Taos Region includes Taos County, as well as the portion of the Embudo watershed within northeastern Rio Arriba County.

Regional water plans address the following concerns: what the available water supply is for a region, what the current and projected future water demands are, and what steps a region plans to undertake to meet future demand with available supply.

According to the Taos regional plan, surface water supplies 90 percent of the region’s water, and more than 90 percent of the surface water is used for agricultural irrigation, which has been insufficient to meet historical demands during periods of drought. Private and community drinking water systems rely mainly on groundwater supplies. The basin is closed to new appropriations based on the Rio Grande Compact and the State Engineer’s policies, so new uses are limited by the availability of transferable water rights.

“The Taos Regional Water Plan was the result of a collaborative effort requiring persistence by the stakeholders in the region,” said López. “Finding common ground is not always easy when planning for future water needs, and we thank the people who persevered to reach a consensus on the Taos Plan.”

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The Taos Regional Water Plan lists among its strategies for meeting future water demand: watershed management, water quality protection, public education, infrastructure improvements, and agricultural conservation among other strategies. The plan also defines public welfare criteria, including cultural protection, agrarian character, ecological health, long-term economic development potential, and recreational tourism.

Development of the Taos Regional Water Plan was overseen by representatives of county and municipal governments; community water systems (including mutual domestic water consumer associations); the Taos Soil and Water Conservation District; farming and ranching groups; acequias; federal agencies; watershed groups; state agencies; nonprofit organizations; mining, commercial, and recreational enterprises; and others. The region's two pueblos were informed of the regional water planning process, but chose not to participate in the steering committee.

Development of the plan was funded by about \$494,000 in grants from the Interstate Stream, which is comparable to development costs for other regional water plans.

With the acceptance of the Taos Regional Water Plan, all 16 regions of the state have baseline regional water plans. The 15 regional water plans that were previously accepted by the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission are Northeastern New Mexico, Southwest New Mexico, Mora-San Miguel Region, Colfax County, Jemez y Sangre Area, Lower Pecos Valley, Lea County, Tularosa-Sacramento and Salt Basins, Estancia Basin, Socorro-Sierra, San Juan Basin, Northwest New Mexico Region, Middle Rio Grande, Lower Rio Grande, and Rio Chama.

Governor Bill Richardson directed the Interstate Stream Commission to have a comprehensive statewide water plan in place by the end of 2003. The Interstate Stream Commission has worked for many years with all regions of the state to prepare their own regional water plans. The New Mexico State Legislature requires the State Water Plan to be reviewed and updated every five years. The Interstate Stream Commission recently completed a review of the 2003 State Water Plan and is now embarking on the State Water Plan Update, which will include the process of integrating the regional water plans into the State Water Plan. Legislative funding is needed to continue the process of periodically updating the baseline regional water plans.

The regional water planning program began in 1987 in order to protect New Mexico's water resources. The Interstate Stream Commission has worked for many years with all 16 regions of the state to prepare their own regional water plans. Once regional water plans are completed, they must be reviewed by Commission staff and accepted by the Commission.

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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