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Grand Opening Celebration Held for Interstate Stream Commission's Los Lunas Silvery Minnow Refugium

(LOS LUNAS, New Mexico) – Rio Grande silvery minnow will live and thrive in \$1.7 million cutting edge facility designed for breeding and rearing the fish in captivity. More than 90 people attended a ribbon cutting ceremony for the Interstate Stream Commission's new facility, which was preceded by a ground blessing ceremony performed by the Pueblo of Santa Anna Governor Bruce Sanchez and Myron Armijo, Office of the State Engineer Tribal Liaison.

Elementary students from the Pueblo of San Felipe enhanced the grand opening celebration with a butterfly dance performance and drumming presentation. Essay and poem projects about the minnow that were collaboratively created by several classes of Desert View Elementary in Los Lunas were read by a student representative. An artistic display of papier mache silvery minnows made in art classes at Desert View Elementary adorned the event tent.

"This facility is just one example of the new role the Interstate Stream Commission has taken on in Governor Bill Richardson's administration and under its responsibility, by statute, to do any and all things necessary to protect, conserve, and develop the waters of the State of New Mexico," said Interstate Stream Commission Chairman Jim Dunlap. "The Commission provided almost \$900-thousand to make this new refugium a reality and has hired expert staff to oversee the operation."

Officials touring the facility included: Interstate Stream Commissioners, state legislators, New Mexico State Engineer John D'Antonio, as well as representatives from Senator Tom Udall's, Senator Jeff Bingaman's, and Representative Martin Heinrich's offices, officials from the U S Fish and Wildlife Service, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, as well as Los Lunas Mayor Robert Vialpando among others.

"This refugium was 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. Cost sharing is being provided to the Endangered Species Collaborative Program as non-federal cost share to the Program."

(MORE)

"This facility will play a key role in ensuring that more silvery minnows are bred, raised and studied in captivity and ultimately released into the river. Reclamation is grateful to the Interstate Stream Commission for its work on this project and its partnership through the Collaborative Program to complete this and other projects that help improve the status of endangered species in the Middle Rio Grande," said Bureau of Reclamation Area Manager John Poland.

The Los Lunas Silvery Minnow Refugium received three awards recently:

- *Southwest Contractor* magazine's "Best of 2008 Awards for New Mexico" as the winner in the small projects category for construction and design excellence, which was awarded to the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission and HDR Engineering Inc in November of 2008;
- McGraw-Hill Construction's "Best of the Best Awards" for New Mexico as engineering design winner for innovation, contribution to the community, aesthetic quality, and craftsmanship was awarded to the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission, HDR Engineering Inc, and Smithco Constuction in January, 2009;
- American Council of Engineering Companies' Engineering Excellence Award as Environmental Category winner based on originality, public perception, and future value was awarded to the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission, HDR Engineering Inc, and Smithco Constuction in February, 2009.

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 consists of a 458-foot-long outdoor "stream" that meanders over 300 linear feet. It is fenced to prevent predation by birds, snakes, and other animals. There are 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 simulate spring runoff conditions for spawning and for habitat for larval fish. Total water volume in the refugium is about half an acre-foot or 162,000 gallons. Water is recirculated using a pumping system at the end of the stream. A rotating fish screen keeps fish within the refugia.

The indoor hatchery is a 50-foot by 30-foot building that houses 25 40-gallon aquaria that are used to spawn minnows and five 680-gallon tanks that hold brood fish.

Construction began in the spring of 2008. The facility has undergone rigorous testing prior to receiving endangered silvery minnow. Fish were stocked in May of this year.

Los Lunas Silvery Minnow Refugium is 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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