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State Engineer's Lower Rio Grande Metering Initiative Is Successful

(LAS CRUCES, New Mexico) — The first full year of groundwater meter data collection in the Lower Rio Grande has been very successful, said New Mexico State Engineer John D'Antonio today.

The meter data show that during 2009 about 180,000 acre-feet of groundwater was pumped by wells in the New Mexico portion of the Lower Rio Grande. About 74 percent of this amount was pumped by irrigation wells, 22 percent by wells supplying water for municipal and residential uses (including golf courses), and 3 percent by wells supplying commercial and industrial needs. It is estimated that the 7,000 domestic and livestock wells that are not metered pumped roughly another 1 percent.

The total amount of irrigation water supplied to New Mexico farms in the Lower Rio Grande during 2009 included about 130,000 acre-feet of groundwater in addition to the about 190,000 acre-feet of Rio Grande Project surface water delivered by Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID). Roughly 80,000 – 90,000 acres are irrigated in this area.

"Most well owners have been very conscientious in reporting their meter readings" said D'Antonio. "In addition, our Water Masters have been out in the field this winter, checking meters and collecting meter readings themselves as necessary. The information provides an improved picture of water supply and groundwater pumping in the Lower Rio Grande."

The State Engineer has been sending notification cards to well owners, to remind them of reporting requirements, and plans to send letters to those who have not yet reported, warning them that they are not in compliance, and explaining the steps they need to take.

Meters are now required on all wells in the Lower Rio Grande, except for single-family domestic wells and small livestock wells. There are now a total of 2,459 metered wells in the Lower Rio Grande Water Master District. Well owners have been cooperative and supportive of the metering requirements, and it is estimated that 90 percent of the larger, active wells are now in compliance. Water Masters are continuing to take the essential steps to achieve 100 percent installation compliance.

(MORE)

Well owners are also required to provide meter readings to the State Engineer's Office. Reporting compliance for 2009 was 88 percent. This data was augmented by meter readings obtained during Water Masters field visits.

The metering program is part of the Active Water Resource Management initiative, which was launched by the State Engineer in January of 2004. The groundwater metering order helps the Office of the State Engineer to manage and administer waters of the Lower Rio Grande stream system by putting in place the tools to effectively manage our state's variable water supply.

The New Mexico 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.

The New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission is charged with 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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