



For immediate release:

November 4, 2010

For more information, contact:

Karin Stangl,
Planning and Communications Director
(505) 699-4923 cell

Regional Water Utility Authority Stakeholders Gather in Portales to Support the Ute Pipeline Project

(SANTA FE, New Mexico) – Stakeholders from Eastern New Mexico gathered in Portales today for a news conference to draw attention to the need for the Eastern New Mexico Rural Water System project, which will help offset increasing dependence on the failing Southern High Plains Aquifer, or Ogallala formation, and to provide infrastructure critical to the economic future of eastern New Mexico.

The mayors of Clovis and Portales attended the event, in addition to the State Engineer and State Legislators.

Groundwater levels in the region are declining at an average rate of up to three feet per year, and water well production is also dropping at an alarming rate.

"Although the Eastern New Mexico Water Utility Authority (ENMWUA) did not receive funding in the President's fiscal year 2011 budget, it did secure \$1 million in a Congressional appropriation in fiscal year 2010," said State Engineer John D'Antonio. "Thanks go to Senators Bingaman and Udall for securing a \$2 million request in the Senate Energy and Water Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2011."

Federal funding is important to the project to keep pace with the State of New Mexico's commitment. The federal government's cost share equals 75 percent or about \$375 million.

To date, the State of New Mexico has provided the bulk of funds, nearly \$20 million, going toward the development of this \$500 million project. Earlier this year, the ENMWUA requested from the US Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and President Obama a \$25 million rural water project request in the President's Budget for fiscal year 2012. The Schedule for implementation of this project in its entirety is directly dependent on funding.

To date, the ENMWUA has completed more than 30 percent level of design of the entire project, and the Environmental Assessment (NEPA) and Biological Assessment (ESA) are near completion.

(MORE)

The Eastern New Mexico Rural Water System project would benefit Curry and Roosevelt counties as well as the cities of Clovis, Portales, and Texico, the towns of Melrose and Elida, and the Village of Grady.

"It is important that we meet this challenge to help provide a future source of sustainable water for these communities in need," said D'Antonio. "Currently this area relies on the Ogallala Aquifer, which will not meet the future demand for water because of diminishing supply. Eastern New Mexico communities have come up with a cooperative solution to meet their needs that would rely on the Ute Reservoir, a surface source of water. This will clear the way for the Ute Pipeline project, which promises to fill that growing need for water."

The Office of the State Engineer is charged with administering the state's water resources. The State Engineer has the responsibility to allocate measure, administer, and oversee the 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 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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