



For immediate release:

December 8, 2004

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State Engineer Announces New Water Master District in the Lower Rio Grande and Orders Metering of Groundwater Diversions

(LAS CRUCES, New Mexico) – New Mexico State Engineer John D’Antonio announced today that a new water master district will be created for the Lower Rio Grande in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

The State Engineer declared the water master district in the area to actively manage and administer the diversions and use of water from the Lower Rio Grande on a day-to-day basis. The declaration also gives the State Engineer the authority to create a position and appoint a water master, who will be based in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Water masters are people who actively administer water on a stream system in New Mexico. They monitor the diversion and use of the waters of a stream system on a daily basis, especially during the irrigation season.

“Water masters serve an important function for the Office of the State Engineer because they are our people in the field who can make sure that water is equitably distributed to water users in a particular area,” said State Engineer John D’Antonio.

Also, to facilitate the water master function, the State Engineer has ordered that all groundwater wells in the Lower Rio Grande be metered.

In coming months, the Office of the State Engineer will be working with water users to develop district-specific regulations and a water master manual that will fit the Lower Rio Grande, since active management of water has proven challenging for the State Engineer in this area, even in the best of water supply years.

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The State Engineer views this declaration of the water master district as a solution to avoiding conflict during this lengthy period of drought. This action is part of the Active Water Resource Management (AWRM) initiative. AWRM refers to a broad range of activities, which include expediting the application transfer process, monitoring and metering diversions and limiting diversion of water to the amount authorized by existing water rights, all within the prior appropriation system.

The State Engineer has already designated priority basin areas around the state, which include in order of priority: San Juan River Basin, Rio Chama, Lower Rio Grande, Nambe-Pojoaque-Tesuque Stream System, Rio Mimbres, Rio Gallinas, and the Lower Pecos Basin.

The State Engineer has organized teams to implement AWRM in the areas of critical concern across the state and is in the process of: designating basin managers; developing and implementing schedules for creating water master guidelines; establishing a realistic budget of metering costs, guidelines, and field implementation and enforcement; developing a plan for communication with the public; hiring a water master for each area of critical concern; and providing training for water masters and other personnel.

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.

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