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Protecting New Mexico's Share of Water in the Lower Rio Grande

(Santa Fe, New Mexico) – Low reservoir levels and lingering drought are just two of the many water challenges the Office of the State Engineer and Interstate Stream Commission are faced with across our state. However, none is more profound than the pending litigation with Texas over water availability in the Lower Rio Grande.

While this litigation works its way through the courts, there is no question that New Mexicans need to work together to maintain the productive aquifers in the Mesilla and Rincon Valleys.

“Given the decline of these regional aquifers – since the signing of the 2008 operating agreement between the Texas irrigation district, the federal government, and the Elephant Butte Irrigation District Board – it is imperative that New Mexico continues to work with local entities to establish groundwater conservation practices that will help sustain aquifer levels for the purpose of a water source and a drought reserve in future years,” said State Engineer John R. D’Antonio.

“We have implemented a Groundwater Conservation Pilot Program to help our state and water right owners to better understand the physical impacts of reduced groundwater pumping. This Program is essential for the future management of the aquifers in the Lower Rio Grande at sustainable levels,” said D’Antonio.

The Office of the State Engineer and the Interstate Stream Commission are being proactive trying to resolve these critical water issues, so New Mexico farmers have an adequate supply of water in future years.

To this end, the State of New Mexico, representatives from the agricultural community, municipal water users, the Public Service Company of New Mexico and New Mexico State University are pursuing a groundwater conservation effort where volunteer participants are compensated for direct groundwater conservation by not pumping or diverting groundwater.

(MORE)

This summer, the Interstate Stream Commission, in conjunction with the Office of the State Engineer's Las Cruces District IV Regional Office, will hold a series of online public outreach meetings to inform Lower Rio Grande area farmers about how to apply for grants that will compensate them for electively choosing to fallow lands and not pump groundwater.

The tentative session dates and times are:

Thursday, July 29, 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Tuesday, August 3, 5:30-6:30 p.m.

Thursday, August 5, 1:00-2:00 p.m.

A website in support of this effort is available at the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer's website under Hot Topics.

In addition to this program, New Mexico will assist in the formation of a local governance entity that includes participation from the diverse water users in the Lower Rio Grande.

The Office of the State Engineer and Interstate Stream Commission will also begin to evaluate the potential for direct groundwater recharge.

"Only through cooperation between Lower Rio Grande water users, our state legislators, and the Office of the State Engineer and Interstate Stream Commission, as well as a clear understanding of the law, can the effort to sustain local aquifers be achieved," said D'Antonio.

The Office of the State Engineer is charged with the 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 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 investigating, conserving and protecting the waters of the State, in addition to water planning.

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