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Cooperative Agreement Prevents a Priority Call on Water for the San Juan River This Year by the State Engineer

(SANTA FE, New Mexico) – Priority administration on the San Juan River this year was averted because major water users on the river in New Mexico have developed and endorsed recommendations and principles for the operation of Navajo Dam and the administration of diversions from the river during the remainder of 2003. The New Mexico State Engineer and the Bureau of Reclamation have accepted the recommendations and principles.

The recommendations were developed in light of the extreme low water supply conditions that occurred last year, the continuance of the drought through the past winter, low storage conditions in Navajo Reservoir, and competing needs for water.

"I support the efforts of water users to work towards cooperative solutions to local or regional problems," said New Mexico State Engineer John D'Antonio. "These solutions are preferable to state or court-imposed actions."

The water users making the recommendations include the Bloomfield Irrigation District, the Hammond Conservancy District, the Farmers Mutual Ditch, the Jewett Valley Ditch, the Public Service Company of New Mexico, the Arizona Public Service Company, BHP Billiton, the Jicarilla Apache Nation and the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Nation approved the recommendations and principles on behalf of the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project and the Fruitland and Hogback irrigation projects. The City of Farmington also endorsed the recommendations.

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Under the recommendations and principles, the water users will share shortages in the water supply available to meet the water use needs from the San Juan River. The Bureau of Reclamation will estimate the amount and percentage shortage that must be incurred by the water users in order to prevent the water surface at Navajo Lake from falling below the active storage capacity in the reservoir. The anticipated shortage will be continually updated through the irrigation season to reflect actual runoff and revised streamflow forecasts.

The Navajo Indian Irrigation Project, the City of Farmington, and water uses at the San Juan Generating Station and the Four Corners Power Plant, and associated mines, will reduce the amount of their diversions by the percentage shortage determined by Reclamation. The Citizens, Hammond, Farmers Mutual, Jewett Valley, Fruitland and Hogback ditches will shorten their irrigation season to save the same percentage of irrigation use. Some of the ditches have already saved some depletion by delaying the start of their season, and the end of the irrigation season will be determined based on the actual water supply that materializes the remainder of the season. It is anticipated that the release from Navajo Dam will not go below 450 cfs this summer.

Reclamation has estimated a shortage of about 3 percent this year based on current water supply conditions and the June 1 snowmelt runoff forecasts for the San Juan Basin issued by the National Weather Service. The shortages are estimated using the minimum probable runoff forecasts to be conservative should the drought continue. The amount of shortage will dissipate as the season progresses if actual runoff conditions permit.

The water users party to the recommendations encourage the other water users in the San Juan Basin to implement water conservation measures as may be appropriate. Of the total flow in the San Juan River downstream from Farmington, only roughly half is supplied by the San Juan River and regulated by Navajo Dam. The Animas River contributes most of the remainder.

The State Engineer will assist in monitoring the implementation of the recommendations and principles. The State Engineer also will see to the continued installation of flow gaging equipment on ditches in the San Juan Basin. With funding support from the Interstate Stream Commission, the State Engineer has installed gaging equipment on many ditches in the basin with their cooperation. Measurement of diversions is necessary to implement cooperative solutions such as the recommendations or water rights administration.

The Office of the State Engineer and the Interstate Stream Commission are separate but companion agencies charged with administering the state's water resources. The agencies have power over the supervision, measurement, appropriation and distribution of almost all surface and ground water in New Mexico, including streams and rivers that cross state boundaries. The State Engineer is also secretary to the Interstate Stream Commission and oversees the staff of both agencies.

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