

PUBLIC NOTICE OF A PROPOSED SOLE SOURCE AQUIFER DESIGNATION

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, REGION 6
1445 ROSS AVENUE
DALLAS, TEXAS 75202-2733

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region 6, announces the receipt of a petition requesting the designation of an aquifer system in North Central New Mexico as a sole or principal source of drinking water and hereby opens a public comment period to request information about the area, identified as follows:

Aquifer: Espanola Basin Aquifer System

Location: The Counties of Santa Fe, Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, and Taos, New Mexico

The Sole Source Aquifer (SSA) program was established under Section 1424(e) of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) of 1974. This section authorizes the EPA Administrator to determine that an aquifer is the "sole or principal" source of drinking water for an area. After such a determination is made, no commitment for Federal financial assistance (through a grant, contract, loan guarantee, or otherwise) may be entered into for any project that the Administrator determines may contaminate such aquifer through a recharge zone so as to create a significant hazard to public health. The EPA may negotiate modifications of such projects in order to protect water quality in the aquifer. Further information on the SSA program and the petition is available at <http://www.epa.gov/region6/water/swp/ssa/index/>. A final decision to approve or deny the petition for the Espanola Basin Aquifer as a Sole Source Aquifer will be made after the close of the comment period, which ends at close of business on September 12, 2006.

The Citizens for Environmental Safeguards has petitioned for designation of the Espanola Basin Aquifer. The proposed designation covers an area of approximately 3,000 square miles, which includes the cities of Santa Fe, Los Alamos, and Espanola. The Pueblos of San Juan, Santa Clara, Pojoaque, San Ildefonso, Nambe, Tesque, Picuris, and Cochiti are also included.

To qualify for designation the following criteria must be met:

- At least half of the drinking water consumed in the area must be from the aquifer.
- There should be no economically feasible alternative source that can supply more than half of the drinking water in the area.
- The proposed boundaries of the area should define a distinct aquifer or part of an aquifer that is hydrogeologically distinct.

The EPA solicits comments on how the petition does, or does not satisfy these requirements.

An EPA representative will informally discuss the petition and the Sole Source Aquifer program at a town meeting scheduled from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 15, 2006, in the Santa Fe Public Library, La Farge Branch, 1730 Llano, Santa Fe, New Mexico. A public hearing is also scheduled at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, August 15, 2006, at the Santa Fe Community College, Jemez Room, 6401 Richards Avenue, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Written and verbal comments regarding the petition will be received by EPA at the hearing. Anyone needing special provisions at the hearing site due to disabilities (i.e., interpreters for the hearing impaired, wheelchair access, etc.), is requested to contact the EPA, within ten (10) working days of the hearing date, at the EPA address below or at the following e-mail address: howard.minnie@epa.gov or Ms. Minnie Howard at (214) 665-7189.

All persons, including the petitioner, may submit comments on the proposed designation, along with their name and address, to the EPA address shown below. All written comments must be postmarked by September 12, 2006, to be considered in formulating a final decision. Requests for information regarding the decision process, and requests for copies of the fact sheet (description of the proposed designation) should be sent to EPA Region 6 at the address shown below. Information on this petition may also be obtained by contacting Minnie Howard at the number listed above and at <http://www.epa.gov/region6/water/swp/ssa/index>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency - Region 6
Source Water Protection Branch (6WQ-S)
1445 Ross Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75202-2733

The administrative record for this petition decision is available for review beginning July 27, 2006, between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, for the extent of the comment period, at the address above. A copy of the petition is also available for review at the Santa Fe Public Library, La Farge Branch during normal business hours at the following location:

Santa Fe Public Library
La Farge Branch
1730 Llano Street
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501
(505) 955-4862

Pertinent EPA comment and public hearing procedures may be found in 40 CFR §124.10 and §124.12.

The EPA will notify the applicant and each person who has submitted written and oral comments of the final designation decision. The final decision will also be published in the Federal Register.