State of New Mexico
ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT
Office of the Secretary
Harold Runnels Building
1190 St. Francis Drive, P.O. Box 26110
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502-6110
Telephone (505) 827-2855
Fax (505) 827-2836

BILL RICHARDSON
GOVERNOR

RON CURRY
SECRETARY

DERRITH WATCHMAN-MOORE
DEPUTY SECRETARY

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Contact: Adam Rankin, NMED Communications Director
Phone: (505) 827-0314

Additional Fish Consumption Advisories Announced

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), Department of Health (NMDOH), Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) and New Mexico State Parks have issued fish consumption advisories for some species of fish in Brantley Reservoir, near Carlsbad, and Abiquiu and Cochiti reservoirs, as well as for parts of the Rio Grande from Frijoles Canyon (Bandelier National Monument) to Pojoaque Creek.

"Public health and safety is our first priority," said Cindy Padilla, Director of NMED's Water and Waste Management Division. "While the fish sample sizes are small, we had enough data based on the elevated levels of contaminants present that we felt it was important to issue these advisories even as we plan to collect more samples in the coming months and possibly revise the advisories."

Fish consumption advisory information can be accessed on-line at www.nmenv.state.nm.us/swqb/advisories.

Brantley Reservoir

Data released by NMED and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) show that elevated concentrations of total DDT, a banned pesticide that is a probable human carcinogen, are present in channel catfish and walleye from Brantley Reservoir. Although only a small amount of data is currently available, the concentrations of DDT are high enough to cause a health concern to people of all ages and to suggest action be taken now to advise against eating the fish.

A composite sample from five channel catfish had 1,761 parts per billion (ppb) DDT, which is more than three times the EPA do-not-eat guidance level of 550 ppb. A composite sample of five walleye had 485 ppb DDT.

These data suggest that no channel catfish should be eaten and that no more than 4 ounces of walleye should be eaten per month from Brantley Reservoir. Other fish species from Brantley have yet to be tested. The state is in the process of collecting more data from Brantley Reservoir fish, which may result in a revised advisory.

The agencies are working together to post the advisory and minimize disruptions to recreational fishing at Brantley Reservoir.

A fish consumption advisory due to mercury contamination is already in place for several fish species at Brantley, advising limited eating of channel catfish and walleye. This new advisory recommends

against eating any channel catfish and further limiting walleye consumption due to DDT contamination.

Abiquiu and Cochiti Reservoirs and the Rio Grande

Data collected by NMED from Abiquiu and Cochiti reservoirs show that elevated levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a group of industrial chemicals that are also probable human carcinogens, are present in channel catfish. PCB levels in samples of channel catfish exceed the EPA do-not-eat guidance level. These data suggest that no channel catfish should be eaten from either Abiquiu or Cochiti reservoirs.

Los Alamos National Laboratory has also collected data from fish in the Rio Grande that show elevated concentrations of PCBs in common carp between Frijoles Canyon and Pojoaque Creek, and in channel catfish between Otowi Bridge and Pojoaque Creek. Levels of PCBs sampled in these fish also exceed the do-not-eat guidance level, suggesting that no common carp and no channel catfish caught within these areas should be eaten at all.

Fish consumption advisories due to mercury contamination are also already in place in Abiquiu and Cochiti reservoirs for several fish species, including channel catfish. No fish advisories were previously in place for any fish species in the Rio Grande.

Los Alamos National Laboratory collected additional fish samples from Cochiti and Abiquiu reservoirs for PCBs in 2005 and is currently evaluating those data. The state plans to collect more data from Abiquiu, Cochiti and Rio Grande fish in the coming months. When more data become available, this advisory may be revised.

While PCB levels measured in Rio Grande fish tissues were above EPA do-not-eat guidelines, PCB levels in Rio Grande water poses no risk to human health through swimming, wading, or drinking. A 2002-2003 regional study of PCBs found that levels were below the wildlife habitat standard and that the highest levels of PCBs detected in Rio Grande water was 12.77 parts per trillion (ppt), well below the drinking water standard of 500 ppt.

Several municipalities, including Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Española, plan to divert Rio Grande water to supplement drinking water sources. Because PCBs are carried on sediment in the water, normal treatment of river water would remove the bulk of PCBs, further reducing the levels within federal and state standards.

For more information, contact Adam Rankin, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314, or Deborah Busemeyer, NMDOH Public Information Officer, at (505) 827-2619, or Dan Williams, NMDGF, Communications Director, at (505) 476-8004, or Erica Asmus-Otero, State Parks Public Information Coordinator, at (505) 827-1473.

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