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NEWS RELEASE

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Assistance for Public Water Systems at Risk of Shortage

Santa Fe, NM – Public water systems at risk of having their wells and springs dry up can tap into the expertise of several government and non-profit organizations. The N.M. Environment Department, the N.M. Office of the State Engineer, the N.M. Rural Water Association, the N.M. Association of Counties, the N.M. Municipal League, and the Rural Community Assistance Corporation are collaborating to provide public water systems in New Mexico with recommendations, training and expert consultation on how to safeguard the sustainability of their drinking water sources.

“Many areas of New Mexico are experiencing the combined impact of groundwater depletion, extreme drought conditions, and aging or leaking infrastructure” said Cabinet Secretary-Designate Ryan Flynn. “As a result New Mexico has had several water systems experience water shortages or outages.”

“Water conservation is an effective long term solution to alleviating the risk of water shortage, and does not require funding for infrastructure” said N.M. State Engineer Scott Verhines. “And, aggressive conservation is one of the most immediate short term tools available for a community to stretch its current supply.”

“The collaborating organizations have a tremendous amount of staff expertise,” said Matt Holmes, Executive Director of the N.M. Rural Water Association. “We strongly encourage any water system that is experiencing decreased production, or shortage, to contact us and request assistance.”

“At least two communities have had to haul water in tanker trucks this year,” said Regina Romero of the N.M. Municipal League. “Hauling water is a very expensive process that should be avoided if at all possible.”

“County emergency personnel work closely with state and federal agencies to assist communities if they run out of water,” said Paul Gutierrez, Executive Director of the N.M. Association of Counties. “With good planning and collaboration with all stakeholders, we hope to prevent water outage emergencies in the future.”

“It is very important that the water system leadership and consumers play an active role in protecting their source of drinking water,” said Blanca Surgeon of the Rural Community Assistance Corporation. “The effort will more likely be successful if the entire community participates.”

The water organizations made the following specific recommendations to public water systems:

- A. **Monitor for indicators of the system’s vulnerability to water shortages.** Routinely measure and record (no less than quarterly) the static and pumping water levels and the specific conductance in your production wells to track changes that may indicate a decrease in groundwater levels. Maintain production records on a monthly basis and evaluate changes in gallons per minute (gpm) produced;
- B. **Discuss water conservation with your decision making body and community members.** Specifically address the ability to implement mandatory and/or voluntary water conservation measures including a tiered water rate system. Utilize drought planning tools and guidance provided by the Office of the State Engineer Water Use and Conservation Bureau;
- C. **Develop an Emergency Response Plan to prepare for potential water outages.** Identify emergency sources of potable water and approved water haulers as part of the plan. Reserve emergency funding for unexpected repairs and equipment replacement;
- D. **Participate in the New Mexico Water and Wastewater Agency Response Network (NMWARN).** This organization allows water systems to join a statewide network through a private agreement between public water systems to share resources temporarily in emergency situations. Always communicate with neighboring systems to see if an interconnection or local resource sharing option is viable in an emergency;
- E. **Complete a developmental planning process** such as a Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) or update an existing one to determine the best way to secure backup water sources; and
- F. **Develop a Source Water Protection Plan.** Update or implement your existing plan.
- G. **Maintain an Asset Management Plan.** Include a routine water audit. Understand your system’s water loss and develop a plan to reduce it.

Training sessions are also being developed specifically to address enhancing the drought capacity within a public water system. Next available sessions will be held at the NM Rural Water Association conferences at both the Taos Convention Center, October 15-17 and at the Las Cruces Hotel Encanto, November 12-14.

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