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New Report Outlines Adverse Impacts of Climate Change on New Mexico

(Santa Fe, NM) — A new report prepared by state agencies indicates the potentially significant environmental changes New Mexico will experience – impacts to water supplies, economic activity, public health, wildlife and entire ecosystems – as a result of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions.

Convened by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), the state agency working group prepared the report, “Potential Effects of Climate Change on New Mexico,” based on peer-reviewed scientific reports and climate impact assessments as part of Governor Bill Richardson’s Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Executive Order, issued June 9, 2005.

“The best science available shows that climate change will have serious impacts on our state, especially on our precious water resources,” Governor Richardson said. “We have a responsibility to act now and take action before it is too late. That’s why I am leading New Mexico to combat climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and conserve energy. We can do this while at the same time creating jobs and keeping our economy healthy.”

There is broad agreement among the world’s scientific community that human activities are increasing the global concentration of greenhouse gases that serve to trap the sun’s heat, inducing warming that is already being measured globally at a rate that is expected to accelerate through the next century.

Since the industrial revolution, the concentration of carbon dioxide, a key greenhouse gas, has increased more than 30 percent, and methane, an even more potent greenhouse gas, has more than doubled. In the last 100 years, average global temperatures have increased about 1° Fahrenheit and are projected to rise another 2.5° F to 10.4° F over the course of this century, depending on the rate of future greenhouse gas emissions.

The report assesses potential impacts on the state’s water resources and snow pack levels, outdoor recreation and tourism, infrastructure, agriculture, forests and rangelands, environmental quality and human health.

“This report is meant to highlight climate change issues of particular concern for state and local governments and other decision makers so they can begin to anticipate the climate shift that will occur over the coming years,” NMED Secretary Ron Curry said. “It’s a first go at evaluating the state’s vulnerabilities based on what experts think the future holds.”

The report notes that recent evidence suggests climate change is not always gradual, but can transition rapidly once a threshold or “tipping point” is reached. The report warns that in New Mexico a warming climate will likely have significant impacts on the state’s water resources, such as increased evaporative loss from reservoirs and lakes, as well as from soils and plants. It will also mean more wintertime precipitation will fall as rain, as opposed to snow, resulting in a diminished snow pack, decreased spring runoff, and much lower stream flows in summer.

Other anticipated impacts from climate change highlighted in the report include:

- More extreme weather, including increased flood events, more severe and prolonged droughts and increased risk of wildfire;
- Increased demand on the state’s energy infrastructure to meet cooling demands;
- Less water availability and subsequent water-use restrictions may necessitate the re-engineering of sewage treatment systems;
- Negative impacts on outdoor recreation, especially snow and water sports, and related tourism;
- Loss of between 17 percent to 72 percent of suitable trout habitat in the Rocky Mountains and an overall reduction in biodiversity with some possible extinctions; and
- Increased concentrations of smog and pollution from particulates (dust and smoke).

The entire report is available online at

http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb/cc/Potential_Effects_Climate_Change_NM.pdf .

“With the foresight of Governor Richardson, New Mexico is taking a leadership role addressing climate change and actually walking the talk,” Secretary Curry said.

In 2005, New Mexico became the first state to sign on to the Chicago Climate Exchange, committing to reduce state government greenhouse gas emissions 4 percent by the end of 2006. The Governor’s executive order also created the New Mexico Climate Change Advisory Group, which is developing ways to reduce statewide emissions to 2000 levels by 2012, and then 10 percent below 2000 levels by 2020, and 75 percent below 2000 levels by 2050. A final advisory group report is due by the end of this year.

The next advisory group meeting will be held in Las Cruces at the New Mexico State University campus from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Jan. 11.

Additional information on New Mexico’s efforts at combating global warming is available at www.nmclimatechange.us. For more information, contact Adam Rankin, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314.

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