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For Immediate Release

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Environment Secretary Requests Assistance from EPA in Addressing Effects of Off Road Vehicles on Rivers and Streams of National Forests in New Mexico

NMED Requests \$150,000 to Assess Water Quality Impacts from Unauthorized ATV Use

(Santa Fe, NM) New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry sent a letter to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 6 Administrator Al Armendariz requesting assistance with the unauthorized use of off road vehicles that is threatening fragile rivers and streams in national forests in New Mexico.

The letter (attached) details Secretary's concerns about the impact to the environment and water quality that results from the use of unauthorized trails and roads by off road and all terrain vehicles in those forests. In addition, Secretary Curry requests \$150,000 in EPA funding to conduct an assessment of water quality impacts caused by ORV and ATV use in the Jemez Mountains within the Santa Fe National Forest.

"These informal motorized routes follow or criss-cross streams damaging stream bank integrity and riparian vegetation, accelerating erosion and creating deep gullies and headcuts that are particularly devastating in New Mexico's fragile arid landscape," Secretary Curry states in the letter. "I personally toured an area of the Jemez Mountains affected by ORV and ATV use in 2009 and expressed my concerns to the Santa Fe National Forest supervisor regarding the impacts I observed to state surface water resources. One year later, ORV and ATVs are still uncontrolled on our national forest public lands, destroying the fragile soils and riparian ecosystems that have been entrusted to the Forest Service."

More than 100 miles of perennial water bodies are impaired for suspended or bedded sediment in the Jemez Ranger District of the Santa Fe National Forest. The department would use requested EPA funding to hire a technical contractor to quantify the contribution from ORV/ATV activity to turbidity/sediment impairments through collection of stream discharge, turbidity and geomorphic assessment data. The funding would also be used to identify those areas where ORV/ATV activities have the greatest impact on water quality in order to focus mitigation efforts.

The Forest Service has been working with NMED through its 319 program to address impacts in particular areas within the Rio Cebolla, East Fork of the Jemez River, Rio de las Vacas and the Rio Guadalupe,

according to the letter. However, a significant potential contributor to forest-wide water quality impacts, ORV and ATV use, remains unaddressed.

The department is awaiting the release of the Santa Fe National Forest's release Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Forest's Travel Management Plan for public comment.

For more information, call Marissa Stone Bardino at (505) 827-0314.

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