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Immediate Release

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Departments of Environment and Health Investigate San Patricio Water

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) and the New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) are launching an investigation into reports of environmental health concerns in the San Patricio community of Lincoln County, east of Ruidoso. Several area residents have reported symptoms after coming in contact with water in the Rio Ruidoso, which runs through the community.

“Water, especially in drought times, is so central to life in New Mexico that we must be vigilant about its protection,” NMED Secretary Ron Curry said. “Good water quality is the essential ingredient for healthy New Mexicans, so reports of possible illness from environmental agents require swift and thorough investigation.”

Inter-disciplinary teams of water quality experts will be covering all possible bases to determine if there is a contamination problem and to discover what might be the source or sources. Field investigations will start at 7 a.m., February 11. NMED scientists will be contacting private domestic well owners within the investigation target area to obtain permission for sampling. Because of the focused nature of the investigation, NMED will be unable to provide on-demand testing of wells outside of the target area.

The investigation will include chemical and microbiological testing of both ground and surface water. Groundwater is of concern because aquifer seepage into the river could carry groundwater contaminants into surface water. Teams will test for fecal coliform, nitrate, sulfate, pH, electrical conductivity, iron, fluoride, temperature and organic vapors. Some results will be available the day of the sampling, others may take several days to a month to get back from the laboratory.

Potential sources of contamination will be identified and assessed. Area residents who believe they have symptoms that could be consistent with waterborne disease will be asked to provide this information confidentially to the Health Department. The Health Department has reviewed public health records for potential waterborne infectious diseases for the Glencoe and San Patricio communities, but neither laboratories nor physicians in the area have reported any to date.

For more information contact Dennis McQuillan, Field Operations Manager, at (505) 476-8607. To report health concerns believed to be associated with the water, contact Judith Espinoza of the New Mexico Department of Health at 1-888-878-8992. For media inquiries, contact Adam Rankin, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314.

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