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**New Mexico Environment Department to Sponsor Workshop on
Rio Grande Bacteria Tracking**

(Santa Fe, NM) – Since the late 1970s, bacteria that comes from human and animal waste, has been a contamination concern in the middle section of the Rio Grande after rainstorm runoff moves into the river causing high counts of fecal coliform bacteria. Now the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) and local entities are using new technology to determine the source of the fecal coliform bacteria -- to determine if it is from humans, domestic animals, livestock, or wild animals -- so that it may be reduced.

The study will use a technique known as Bacteria Source Tracking (BST), a new method being developed to determine the sources of fecal coliform bacteria using environmental fecal samples. BST has been described as having the ability to turn nebulous “nonpoint” sources of contamination, arising from diffuse surface runoff, into specific, identified “point” sources. This study, funded by the NMED, Bernalillo County and the Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo Flood Control Authority, and conducted by environmental consulting firm Parsons, will provide municipal, state, federal and tribal authorities the data necessary to efficiently focus resources on known causes of contamination within their jurisdictions.

To initiate this Bacteria Source Tracking project, the NMED is sponsoring a workshop explaining the technology, providing case studies and discussing experimental designs. The workshop will be Thursday, May 30, from 1:30-5:00 at the University of New Mexico Conference Center, 1634 University Boulevard NE, Room H. The public is encouraged to attend, ask questions and initiate

discussion on the topic of potential sources of fecal coliform bacteria throughout the middle Rio Grande valley.

Fecal coliform bacteria are indicator organisms, meaning that they may indicate the presence of disease-causing bacteria that are impractical to monitor. Contact with waters contaminated with high levels of fecal coliform bacteria may increase the chance of developing illness, including fever, nausea, and stomach cramps. Fecal coliform bacteria may be present in the river as a result of sewage treatment system overflow or runoff that has been in contact with human or animal waste.

Collaborative discussions among state, federal, municipal and tribal entities have centered on the NMED's recently developed Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for fecal coliform for the Middle Rio Grande. The TMDL calculates the total amount of the pollutant, in this case fecal coliform bacteria, that can be introduced into the Rio Grande without the river exceeding water quality standards. Another federal and state regulatory change driving the need for this information is the requirement that by 2003, communities with a population over 10,000, and others that discharge to the river, must develop Storm Water Management Programs to reduce the fecal coliform loads entering the Rio Grande and stay within the TMDLs.

For additional information, please contact David Hogge, Program Manager of the Total Maximum Daily Load Development Section, at (505) 827-2981 or Stephanie Stringer, Outreach Coordinator for the SWQB at (505) 827-0418.

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