



For Immediate Release  
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## **Governor Bill Richardson Honors Earth Day with Effort to Protect Thousands of Miles of New Mexico Rivers and Streams**

*Designation as ONRW Will Protect 5,340 Miles of Surface Waters in New Mexico National Forests and Roadless Areas*

(Santa Fe, NM) – Governor Bill Richardson today announced his plan to pursue protection for all surface waters within national forest wilderness and inventoried roadless areas in New Mexico. By seeking designation for those waters as Outstanding National Resource Waters (ONRW) under the Federal Clean Water Act these vital headwater streams will remain pristine and protected far into the future.

The designation, if approved by the New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission, will protect the state's headwater streams that flow from mountain forests. It will also help counter efforts by the Bush Administration to weaken protections in inventoried roadless areas.

“This initiative will provide the highest level of water quality protection possible for more than 5,000 miles of beautiful rivers and streams,” Governor Richardson said. “This ensures that these pristine waters – including world-class trout fishing areas and vital drinking water supplies -- will remain clean for the next generation to enjoy.”

Governor Richardson charged the task of protecting the surface waters and developing documentation for its designation as ONRW to the New Mexico Environment Department.

“We will use the designation as a tool to maintain the quality of the water and to protect the integrity of the waters,” Secretary Curry said. “The New Mexico Environment Department's Surface Water Quality Bureau will work with other state agencies to conduct the intense work and public process negotiations that will pave the way for the designation. Our work will include reaching out to communities and stakeholders around the state.”

The petition nominates 5,340 miles of the state's waters as Outstanding. ONRWs are waters that receive special protection against degradation under New Mexico's water quality standards and the federal Clean Water Act. They are designated by the Water Quality Control Commission. Waters eligible for ONRW designation include those that are part of a national or state park, wildlife refuge or wilderness areas, special

trout waters, waters with exceptional recreational or ecological significance, and high quality waters that have not been significantly modified by human activities.

ONRW designation benefits all users of the water including any downstream users by protecting against water quality degradation. If watershed conditions along the ONRW need improvement, designation can help to funnel restoration efforts and financial assistance into the area.

Land-use activities in existence at the time an ONRW is designated will not be affected so long as they are controlled by best management practices and do not result in new or increased discharges of contaminants to the ONRW after designation. New land uses or activities can proceed if they do not cause water quality degradation in the ONRW.

The ONRW designation, if successful, will be the third for New Mexico. All these designations have occurred under the Richardson Administration.

Governor Richardson pursued that designation for the Valle Vidal in 2006 and supported the efforts of Amigos Bravos to gain designation for the Rio Santa Barbara in 2005.

The Valle Vidal was designated as an ONRW in 2006 to protect that pristine wilderness from energy development. The WQCC designated the Rio Santa Barbara in the Pecos Wilderness near Penasco as an ONRW in 2005.

Governor Richardson is a proponent of the Clinton Administration roadless rule and worked to counter the Bush administration's attempts to weaken that rule.

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