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State Agencies to Hold Public Meetings on Governor Richardson's Efforts to Designate Outstanding National Resource Waters across New Mexico

Meetings Will Be Held Tomorrow in Taos and Wednesday in El Rito

WHAT: The New Mexico Environment Department, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department and Department of Game and Fish will hold a series of public meetings on the state's efforts to designate Outstanding National Resource Waters (ONRWs). Governor Bill Richardson announced on Earth Day this year the state's intention to seek ONRW designation for surface waters within national forest wilderness and inventoried roadless areas in New Mexico. The Governor's initiative includes waters located in wilderness and inventoried roadless areas within the Greater Gila, Lower Canadian, Rio Chama, Upper Rio Grande, Middle Rio Grande, Upper Pecos, and Greater Sacramento watersheds. The meetings will provide an opportunity for the public to learn more about ONRWs, discuss concerns about proposed ONRW nominations, and get information about proposed ONRW designations in wilderness and roadless areas.

WHY: ONRWs are waters that receive special protection against degradation under New Mexico's water quality standards and the federal Clean Water Act. 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 provides the highest level of water quality protection in New Mexico. Designation benefits all users of the water, including any downstream users, by protecting against water quality degradation. ONRWs are often headwater streams that ultimately feed municipal drinking water systems and irrigation uses. Additionally, wildlife and aquatic species benefit from ONRW designation because headwater streams provide irreplaceable habitat. Cities such as Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Las Vegas are currently diverting or are planning diversions from waters that are downstream of wilderness and roadless areas waters that would be more fully protected by ONRW designation. These municipal water supplies will also benefit from the higher level of protection afforded by ONRW designation.

WHERE and WHEN:

- **Taos**, Tuesday October 7, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Juan I. Gonzales Agricultural Center Conference Room, turn west on Chamisa Road from Paseo del Pueblo Sur
- **El Rito**, Wednesday October 8, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., El Rito Public Library, 182 Placitas

For more information, contact Marcy Leavitt at (505) 827-1758 or Marcy.Leavitt@state.nm.us, or visit <http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/swqb/onrw/index.html> .

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