



Bill Richardson  
Governor

**NEW MEXICO  
ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT**

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Ron Curry  
Secretary  
Jon Goldstein  
Deputy Secretary

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For Immediate Release

Contact: Marissa Stone, NMED Communications Director  
(505) 827-0314 or (505) 231-0475

**Environment Secretary Requests Meeting with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Impacts on Fish from Emissions from Proposed Desert Rock Power Plant**

(Santa Fe, NM) New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry requested a meeting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to discuss the impacts from mercury and other emissions from the proposed Desert Rock Power Plant on threatened and endangered species.

Secretary Curry sent a letter (below) to the service's New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office Supervisor Wally Murphy requesting a meeting to discuss the Biological Assessment for the plant.

"The assessment indicates thirteen chemicals of potential concern, including high levels of mercury and selenium, will be emitted from the proposed Desert Rock facility and will impact the San Juan River and the Rio Grande," Secretary Curry states in the letter. "New Mexico already suffers from the highest emissions of mercury in the nation and San Juan County has the highest mercury emissions in the state. We must do everything possible to protect our rivers, streams, fish and wildlife from impacts from the proposed facility."

The assessment, prepared for the Bureau of Indian Affairs Navajo Area Office and the service by contractor Ecosphere Environmental Services, also indicates these pollutants could potentially jeopardize the Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker. Copies of the assessment, which was completed in December 2008, can be obtained from the bureau or the service. The San Juan River is considered one of the best trout fishing streams in the country but like most streams and lakes in the region, it is under mercury advisories for fish consumption. Mercury emissions from power plants in San Juan County already cause adverse effects in the region, and Desert Rock will exacerbate the risk to public health and both endangered and non-endangered aquatic species.

Mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants are deposited in lakes and streams and can be absorbed into soils and transported to waterways. Methylmercury, an oxidized form of mercury emitted from power plants, accumulates most quickly in fish and other species and takes the longest time to dissipate. Thus it is critical to control mercury, selenium, and other hazardous pollutants at the source to reduce their accumulation in the environment.

Mercury is a toxic pollutant that can cause death, reduced reproduction, impaired growth, and behavioral abnormalities in fish at relatively low levels. Wildlife and birds feeding on mercury contaminated fish also suffer adverse affects. In humans, methylmercury can cause brain and kidney damage.

The Endangered Species Act requires that the service has an opportunity to review and make recommendations on a biological assessment prior to a permit being issued. The previous administration's U.S. Environmental Protection Agency failed to complete that process before issuing the Desert Rock air quality permit.

The U.S. Environmental Appeals Board is in the process of reviewing the Desert Rock permit. The board will decide whether to approve or remand the permit to EPA Region 9.

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

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Letter:

March 30, 2009

Wally Murphy  
US Fish & Wildlife Service  
New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office  
2105 Osuna NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87113

**by electronic mail (Wally\_Murphy@fws.gov) and facsimile (505.346.2542)**

**Re: Biological Assessment for Proposed Desert Rock Energy Project**

Dear Mr. Murphy:

The New Mexico Environment Department requests a meeting with your agency to discuss our concerns regarding the Biological Assessment for the proposed Desert Rock Energy Project submitted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in December 2008. The Department is particularly concerned about the adequacy of the Assessment in light of the predicted impacts of mercury and selenium on the San Juan River and Rio Grande and the endangered species living there, and the failure of the Desert Rock promoters to apply the best available technology for controlling these pollutants.

New Mexico already suffers from the highest emissions of mercury in the nation, and San Juan County has the highest mercury emissions in the state. Mercury emissions from power plants in San Juan County already cause adverse effects in the region, and Desert Rock will exacerbate the risk to public health and both endangered and non-endangered aquatic species.

The Department is available to meet at your convenience. Mr. Jon Goldstein, Deputy Secretary of the Department, will contact you to schedule a meeting.

Sincerely,

Ron Curry  
New Mexico Environment Department Secretary