State of New Mexico
Office of the State Engineer
Interstate Stream Commission

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State Engineer Announces Water Master District and Metering Orders in the Middle Rio Grande

SANTA FE – Farms, businesses, utilities and community water systems that pump groundwater in the Middle Rio Grande Valley will need to start measuring how much water they use under two orders issued today by the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer (OSE).

As New Mexico faces historically dry hydrologic conditions, the orders offer a durable, long-term response. Groundwater in the valley is connected to the river, yet some of its largest wells are not measured or reported. With better data, OSE can protect existing water rights, base decisions on facts instead of assumptions, and help New Mexico meet its Rio Grande Compact obligations.

The orders cover the valley from Cochiti Reservoir to Elephant Butte Reservoir. Existing wells serving a single household or watering livestock are exempt.

“New Mexico is experiencing extended drought and the hydrologic impacts of climate change,” said **New Mexico State Engineer Elizabeth Anderson**. “Metering is one of the tools we use to protect water rights holders, while supporting sustainable water supplies for future generations.”

Owners are required to install an approved meter and submit an initial meter reading by March 1, 2028, and then report quarterly for non-domestic wells and annually for newly drilled single household and livestock wells. Existing wells serving a single household or watering livestock are exempt if used as permitted. Neither order applies to water uses of the six Middle Rio Grande Pueblos. OSE estimates that 600 to 700 existing non-domestic wells will be metered over the next two years pursuant to the new order. While voluntary compliance is expected, enforcement will occur for those who fail to install meters, report use in a timely manner or are found over diverting water.

Many wells in the Middle Rio Grande area are already metered. Metering allows OSE to confirm that water is being diverted in accordance with an approved permit. Metering also helps water users understand how much water they are using, which supports conservation efforts. All municipal wells are already metered, and many of the larger municipalities have demonstrated significant success with conservation programs. For example, Albuquerque and Santa Fe have cut their per capita water use in half over the last 30 years through conservation programs that include significant customer outreach, rebate programs, and water education.

"A meter is a tool, not a penalty," said **Sharon Kindel,** District 1 manager for the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer. "You can't manage what you don't measure - measurement assists with water rights administration in the Middle Rio Grande."

The approach has a proven track record in New Mexico. Similar orders have been in place in the Lower Rio Grande since 2004 and have proven to be an effective way to expand metering and reduce misuse.

All wells in New Mexico must be permitted through the OSE. Failure to obtain a permit, use a licensed well driller, or follow permit conditions (including metering requirements) can result in an OSE Compliance Order that could include monetary fines.

The full orders, approved meter list, and how-to guidance are available at http://ose.nm.gov/MRG/index.php.

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The Office of the State Engineer *is charged with administering the state's water resources. The State Engineer has power over the supervision, measurement, appropriation, and distribution of all surface and groundwater in New Mexico, including streams and rivers that cross state boundaries. The State Engineer is also Secretary of the Interstate Stream Commission.*

The nine-member Interstate Stream Commission *is charged with separate duties including protecting New Mexico's right to water under eight interstate stream compacts, ensuring the state complies with each of those compacts as well as investigating, conserving and protecting the waters of the State, in addition to water planning.* *https://www.ose.state.nm.us*