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State Engineer Issues Order to Protect Groundwater in East Mountain Area

Santa Fe, NM –State Engineer John D’Antonio Jr., P.E., signed an order to protect the groundwater resources of the Sandia Underground Water Basin and a portion of the Rio Grande Underground Water Basin located in Bernalillo and Sandoval Counties east of the Sandia Mountains. The order bars the filing of applications for permits for new appropriations of groundwater in the protected area under Section 72-12-3 of the New Mexico water code. The State Engineer took this action after a study of water level decline data in existing wells in the Sandia Basin and the portion of the Rio Grande Basin directly north of the Sandia Basin showed that the average rate of decline exceeds allowable levels.

The order bars new appropriations under *NMSA 72-12-3*. It does not affect the permitting of new domestic wells under *NMSA 72-12-1.1* or new livestock wells under *NMSA 72-12-1.2*, and does not bar the permitting of changes to or transfers of existing rights. The closure order will remain in effect for an indefinite period, until superseded by further order.

“This closure order assures that groundwater resources and sustained well production are protected for existing water right owners and allows for reasonable economic development for new domestic uses,” said State Engineer D’Antonio.

“Sandoval County supports this move designed to protect the Sandia and Rio Grande Basins and the residents of both Bernalillo and Sandoval counties”, said Wayne Johnson, Sandoval County Manager.

“The County of Bernalillo supports the OSE closure of the Sandia Basin and immediately adjacent hydrologically connected areas,” says Bernalillo County Commission Chair Charlene Pyskoty. “The closure of those areas to new appropriations, except for domestic wells, will help limit the rate of declining water levels throughout that portion of Bernalillo County. The county remains committed to working with the OSE through the county’s well monitoring program and water conservation initiatives to better protect the water resources of the East Mountains/Sandia Basin areas of Bernalillo County,” adds Pyskoty.

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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.