

State of New Mexico

Office of the Governor

Bill Richardson
Governor

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GOVERNOR BILL RICHARDSON ANNOUNCES WATER AGREEMENT

SANTA FE – Governor Bill Richardson today announced a water relinquishment agreement between New Mexico and Texas. Governor Richardson described the new deal as a “win-win compromise.”

Governor Richardson released the following statement during a news conference today:

Today, we have reached agreement to relinquish a portion of the water in Elephant Butte Reservoir that belongs to New Mexico, in a deal that brings water to New Mexico farmers below the reservoir in New Mexico and upstream from Cochiti Dam to the Bosque del Apache Game Refuge.

This is a win-win compromise that brings relief to the farmers along the river through New Mexico and relief to the recreational users of Elephant Butte Reservoir. Instead of the 217,000 acre-foot relinquishment originally proposed, only 122,500 will be relinquished this year. The balance of New Mexico’s credit water will remain in the reservoir until next year.

Additionally, New Mexico will be able to store water for the city of Santa Fe.

I appreciate the efforts of State Engineer John D’Antonio and Interstate Stream Commission Engineer Estevan Lopez in listening to the concerns of the people and in negotiating with the Texas compact commissioner.

The Elephant Butte Irrigation District - New Mexico farmers in the Hatch and Mesilla Valleys who get 57 percent of the total relinquishment -- will draw some water in late May, but will not draw the balance of their relinquishment water until August and September. The El Paso area Texas farmers and their counterparts in Mexico generally follow the Elephant Butte Irrigation District schedule. By August and September, if we’re lucky, the rains through the central part of the state will have begun to recharge the lake.

Elephant Butte Lake will continue as New Mexico’s premier water recreation playground. By any of the possible scenarios, it will remain the biggest and the best. The lake will have enough water for recreation through the summer season, barring a dry rainy season in late summer.

Sen. Pete Domenici has initiated a process to secure drought emergency assistance funding to assist in planning for the future and to improve and extend boat ramps as necessary to keep the recreation lake accessible. Sen. Jeff Bingaman will support that effort as well. I will bring all appropriate state agencies into this effort as well.

This problem is not new - but we are bringing new tools to bear in dealing with it. We will draft a statewide water plan to keep better track of our scarce resource and to help balance the needs of its various users. The drought has been draining away our water for several years. As we cope with it going forward, I will do everything necessary to keep the needs of all the water-based constituencies in the information loop and in the discussions.

We will do the best we can for everyone as we cope with whatever nature deals us in the summer and in the years ahead.

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