



State of New Mexico

Office of the Governor

Bill Richardson
Governor

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Governor Bill Richardson Acts to Protect Valle Vidal's Precious Streams

VALLE VIDAL - Governor Bill Richardson, speaking to dozens of hunters, fishermen, ranchers and wildlife and recreation enthusiasts, announced that he is taking action to protect the streams of the Valle Vidal by nominating them as Outstanding National Resource Waters of New Mexico. This powerful tool, which requires a designation by the state Water Quality Control Commission, will further protect some of our state's most precious natural resources from oil and gas drilling.

"When I ran for governor, I promised New Mexicans I would fight to protect our heritage, our traditions, and our culture," Governor Bill Richardson said during a public rally today in the Valle Vidal. "Nothing represents New Mexico's true spirit better than our precious land and water. No matter how hard we press for economic development, we cannot move New Mexico forward if we sacrifice those things so crucial to our quality of life.

"New Mexicans use public lands for hunting and fishing, grazing, and recreation – and there are places like the Valle Vidal where the federal government should back off on its oil and gas plans. Energy policy needs to be balanced and respect the needs of local folks. That's moving New Mexico forward."

Governor Richardson last fall directed the New Mexico Game and Fish Department to lead an interagency task force to look into the concept of using the designation of Outstanding Natural Resource Waters in the Valle Vidal. Starting today, the nomination process for the Valle Vidal is open to public comment on the Game and Fish website and in its offices.

The nomination is a big step in the fight against opening the 100,000-acre Valle Vidal to oil and gas drilling. It also will help preserve some of New Mexico's best hunting, fishing and hiking opportunities that bring about \$1.5 million a year to area communities.

Elk hunting alone is estimated to bring more than \$500,000 to Taos, Red River, Cimarron and Raton. These once-in-a-lifetime trophy hunts, along with some of our best fishing streams and wildlife scenery, would lose some of their value if oil and gas drilling is allowed.

If drilling is approved, one analysis says 195 to 500 wells could be drilled in the eastern half of the Valle Vidal. That would put hundreds of acres of drilling pads and roads in the primary wintering and spring calving range of 2,500 elk.

"I recognize the importance of energy development, and I have supported energy development and energy efficiency across this state," Governor Bill Richardson said. "But I also think we need to think about the future. We want to maintain these special places across the West, up and down the Rocky Mountain Front."

Governor Richardson urged New Mexicans and all out-of-state visitors who appreciate the value of the Valle Vidal let the U.S. Forest Service know how they feel before the Sept. 15 deadline for public comment on the designation.