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Contact: Allan Oliver
505-476-2214

Governor Richardson Hails Introduction of Landmark Federal Legislation on Aamodt & Abeyta Indian Water Rights Settlements

SANTA FE, NM– Governor Bill Richardson today hailed the introduction of federal legislation to implement the Aamodt and Abeyta Indian Water Rights Settlements as a landmark event in bringing closure to two long-running water rights lawsuits in New Mexico.

“I commend Senators Pete Domenici and Jeff Bingaman and Rep. Tom Udall for their introduction of legislation today to carry out the terms of these two important agreements among New Mexico pueblos, state government and non-Indian water users,” Governor Richardson said. “We face a struggle to get them through Congress, but this introduction highlights the success of the parties working together to achieve compromise.”

The Aamodt settlement determines the rights of the pueblos of Nambe, Pojoaque, Tesuque and San Ildefonso in Santa Fe County, while the Abeyta settlement determines the rights of Taos Pueblo in Taos County.

The settlement agreements were both signed in the spring of 2006 by Governor Richardson, pueblo governors and other parties to the lawsuits.

Introduction of the two pueblo settlements follows the introduction of the Navajo San Juan River settlement bill earlier this year. A funding mechanism proposed in the Navajo bill would cover the federal costs of all three settlements.

“New Mexico negotiated in good faith to meet the water needs of the pueblos and the Navajo Nation in these settlements, while protecting the water rights of non-Indians in the affected basins,” Governor Richardson said. “The state will be there to cover its share of the cost of benefits to non-Indian parties as these settlements move to the implementation phase in the years ahead.

The Aamodt adjudication suit, filed in 1966, is believed to be the oldest active federal lawsuit in the country.