



# News Release



## The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District

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## **2018 IRRIGATION SEASON STARTS UNDER VERY DRY CONDITIONS IN MIDDLE VALLEY**

**Albuquerque** – The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District’s (District) Board of Directors were informed of the very dry conditions and the low forecasted snowmelt runoff at the February 12, 2018 regularly scheduled board meeting. The National Resources Conservation Service’s February 1 forecast estimates a 21% March-July runoff on the Rio Grande at Otowi indicating only 150,000 acre-feet entering the middle valley naturally this season. By comparison, over 850,000 acre-feet flowed down the Rio Grande during the same period last year.

Although natural flow in the Rio Grande will be low this year, the District was judicious with its water last year and has water stored in El Vado Reservoir. MRGCD Water Operations Manager, David Gensler, says the stored water will be released as needed to augment flows through the spring and summer. Given current projections, Gensler expects this supply to get District farmers through much of the summer, hopefully past Labor Day. This projection does assume some valley rains this summer and tight operations throughout the 2018 irrigation season.

Due to soil moisture and low river flows, District diversions will begin earlier than normal in 2018. Diversions will start to the west side of Isleta Dam, which will allow for the Socorro Division to begin running water the week of February 19. Irrigators will be able to begin scheduling water by the end of that week. The east side of Isleta Dam will begin soon thereafter and farmers in Valencia County can begin scheduling deliveries around March 2<sup>nd</sup>. The Albuquerque Division will begin diversions on March 1<sup>st</sup> and scheduling will begin the following week once water has made it through the main canals and laterals. The Cochiti Division will begin diversions in mid-March.

The District is very fortunate to have a good water supply in storage this year and with good cooperation and stewardship of this supply we fully expect to have another successful irrigation season. Farmers that rely on the District water bank, however, should expect periodic curtailments. Water bank curtailment is based on streamflow and reservoir storage conditions, and this year both factors will be heavily dependent on summer rains.

The District will be working very closely with the US Bureau of Reclamation, the Corps of Engineers and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to operate in a manner that manages

anticipated river drying under the seriously dry conditions ahead. Coordinated river operations will help to maintain wetted habitat for the benefit of endangered species, under the 2016 Biological Opinion for the middle Rio Grande.

Updates on the current snowpack conditions, run-off projections for the mid-valley and an irrigation forecast will be posted on the District's website and updated weekly throughout the irrigation season.

"These updates will provide irrigators valuable information regarding water availability in each Division and how they should schedule water deliveries. We are keenly aware of the unusually poor soil moisture conditions this spring and expect to have District canals delivering water as soon as possible after startup. We ask that our farmers to work closely with us on scheduling and delivery rates, to maximize efficient use of the water throughout the District's 1200 mile system." says CEO/Chief Engineer, Mike Hamman. "Our top priority is to give all irrigators the opportunity for a successful season and strive to do so in the most cost effective and efficient manner. The District has numerous challenges, including compliance with the Endangered Species Act, to protect irrigator's water and diversion rights, as well as all our constituents that enjoy the beautiful Rio Grande valley and the services we provide within the District."

Irrigation in the middle Rio Grande valley generally runs from March 1 to October 31.

**About the MRGCD:** The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District has been promoting sustainable agriculture for the past 85 years. The District delivers water to about 70,000 acres of cropland in the Middle Rio Grande Valley. That water is reused time and time again to irrigate crops, sustains the cottonwood bosque along the Rio Grande, helps create and maintain habitat for the endangered Rio Grande silvery minnow and recharges the aquifer. The District owns 30,000 acres of bosque in the valley, the largest continuous cottonwood forest in the world, and a stretch of land that provides unprecedented recreational opportunities and an irreplaceable swath of greenbelt in New Mexico's largest metropolitan area. The District was formed in 1925 to alleviate flooding and to reclaim farmland in the valley. Its boundaries stretch 150 miles from Cochiti on the north to the boundary of the Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge on the south, running through Sandoval, Bernalillo, Valencia and Socorro Counties. It operates more than 1,200 miles of canals, laterals and drains, which are used to convey water to and from cropland. The District is funded by water service charges and property assessments on the benefited lands within its boundaries.

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