



## **Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District**

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### **Action by the Rio Grande Compact Commission to Ease Crisis for Farmers and Prevent Drying of the Rio Grande**

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Albuquerque, NM: Due to extreme drought conditions and historically low Rio Grande flows the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (District) was anticipating running out of its general irrigation water supplies in upstream reservoirs by Saturday morning that would have led to extensive river drying and devastating crop losses throughout the middle Rio Grande valley. Since mid-June, virtually all flow through the middle Rio Grande valley (between Cochiti and Elephant Butte) has been due to water released from upstream reservoirs.

The District will be working with the State to use approximately 38,000 acre-feet of Rio Grande Compact water being held in El Vado Reservoir as debit water owed to Elephant Butte Reservoir. The New Mexico Compact Commissioner, State Engineer John D'Antonio, requested the concurrence by the two states of Colorado and Texas to allow him to direct the use of this supply for emergency purposes within the middle Rio Grande and they agreed to the use of this water with conditions that this supply be judiciously used to prevent catastrophic crop losses and minimize impacts to endangered species.

The District is grateful for the use this water. The amount of water is relatively small, and the Rio Grande is still experiencing exceptionally dry and difficult conditions. The water must be managed very carefully so that no drop goes to waste. The authorization of this release by the Rio Grande Compact Commissioners is an exceptional occurrence, but also cautionary. The District is informing the public and our water users that although we may squeeze by this year, without significant precipitation we can expect to have in excess of 100,000 acre-feet debt to downstream users next year. This water must be replaced as soon as possible to prevent harm to irrigation districts below Elephant Butte Dam and, by the rules of the Compact, may also severely limit the District's use of El Vado Reservoir in future years.

The District will continue to address its top priorities of delivering irrigation water to middle valley farmers that includes the six middle Rio Grande Pueblos, assisting to meet the Rio Grande Compact obligations and optimizing available leased water to meet environmental goals as required under the 2016 Middle Rio Grande biological opinion.

**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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