

December 7, 2021



Dear Fellow Irrigators:

The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District staff is very grateful for the cooperation and support we have received from all of you, recognizing the water shortage situation and pulling together to help us manage, at times, the meager water supply. Together, we made the best of the cards we were dealt this year, and we thank you for doing your part. As you all are aware, the 2021 water supply was looking dire, but late June monsoon rains arrived and continued until late August, which allowed for several additional full irrigations when it was looking like the valley would be fortunate to get only three. Monsoons also produced torrential rain events in some areas causing significant flooding and damage to District canals resulting in delays getting irrigation deliveries back on track in some areas.

The District has been blamed and sued for property damages for storm events well above the 100-year category. Storm events such as these produce significant volumes of water that no MRGCD irrigation canal bank could withstand. The District system was not designed to control upland watershed storm events as that is the realm of flood control authorities such as those developed in Bernalillo and Sandoval counties. There are no such agencies in Valencia and Socorro counties to date. The rains also enabled the District to reserve some of its San Juan-Chama water supply, allowing for later use in August to keep the river up while waiting for another shot of monsoon moisture. As you know things dried out in September and, except for one good storm on September 30<sup>th</sup>, the fall has been very dry to date.

The District now has zero storage available in northern reservoirs with a growing concern that winter snowpack will again be well below average for the third year in a row. Adding to these conditions is the accrued New Mexico debit to the Rio Grande Compact (Compact) that is designed to apportion water between the states of Colorado, New Mexico, and two irrigation districts below Caballo Dam, one in New Mexico and one in Texas and a treaty allocation to Mexico (all referred to as Texas). The cycle of water supply over the past several years has created persistently low reservoir supplies at Elephant Butte Reservoir, which then limits storage at El Vado Reservoir. El Vado is the District's only reservoir for supplemental water and is critical for supplying water to farm fields and the river after the runoff recedes normally in late June or early July. New Mexico remains in debit to the Compact which is now estimated to be around 110,000 acre-feet by December 31, 2021. If we continue to add to the debit in 2022, it may push us near or above the 200,000 acre-feet maximum allowable debit and New Mexico will then be in violation of Article VI of the Compact.

The Board of Directors, concerned about the mounting debit and serving farmer's needs, will be discussing staff recommendations regarding the startup of the 2022 irrigation season on December 13<sup>th</sup> leading to a formal decision on January 10<sup>th</sup> in order to manage the debit for 2022 but also to provide a startup process that is fair and allows for an earlier first watering than what occurred during the spring of 2021. But the bottom line is: **As long as New Mexico is in debit to the Rio Grande Compact, the District will struggle to meet summer demands without access to El Vado Reservoir storage. There will likely be severe summer shortages if there is a below average snowpack supply and limited monsoon rains.**

P.O. Box 581

87103-0581

1931 Second St. SW

Albuquerque, NM

87102-4515

505.247.0234

Fax # 505.243.7308

*For more information about the District and its programs please check out the website at [www.mrgcd.com](http://www.mrgcd.com) or reach out to District personnel at (505) 247-0234.*

**A look ahead to the winter and spring of 2022 and beyond:** The National Weather Service is indicating that the North American Southwest is heading into a La Niña weather pattern that usually, but not always, means a warmer and dryer climate. It may be similar or worse than last year's winter as the basin received only about 65% of normal supply during the runoff and a similar percent allocation from the San Juan-Chama Project. A very dry fall is continuing with no meaningful precipitation in the forecast for the next few weeks. Current snowpack numbers are the lowest for this time of year since 2018, a historically low runoff year. On a good note, the US Bureau of Reclamation is beginning dam safety work at El Vado Dam that will require the almost complete draining of the reservoir after the 2022 runoff so the contractor can begin fixing the faceplate from the bottom up. The reservoir will have restricted storage capacity (120,000 acre-feet) during the runoff of 2023 while they finish up the faceplate and grouting work and then a new contract will be issued to replace the spillway so by the runoff of year 2026, El Vado Dam will be fully available to store up to 192,000 acre-feet when we have a good runoff year. Hopefully, the debit to the Compact will be small so we can use most of the volume to provide summer irrigation releases as we enjoyed annually since 1985 and up until last season.

Please use this information in planning your cropping pattern and farm operations for the coming season and the District will be updating you as conditions change to help in your farming decisions. The District is implementing a number of actions that includes pursuing grants to assist farmers in managing on-farm water use and other agricultural services. We received a nearly \$3M Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) grant from NRCS that will enable the District to assist producers with on-farm projects over the next few years and it will work similarly to the EQIP program but will be managed by the District.

There will again be a volunteer following program that will allow for eligible producers to take a full season or partial season off for a payment. Open enrollment for this program will start on January 18th of 2022, with full season enrollment closing on February 25th, and partial season enrollment ending on May 20th. Please see the included brochure that speaks to the full range of services the District is working on to provide to those producers needing assistance with on-farm water and soils management or who choose to join the following program. Our number one priority and focus is to manage available water that provides for productive agriculture and to assist producers with efficient on-farm water use to maintain or improve high quality crop yields even in light of persistent drought. **To achieve this for the long-term, the District must assist in meeting annual Compact delivery requirements, get full use of El Vado Reservoir, and remain compliant under the federal Endangered Species Act.**

On a personal note, I have accepted a new position created in the Governor's Office to assist the state and local agencies with water supply and infrastructure needs that will include MRGCD and other agencies in the entire Rio Grande valley and other regions across the state. My last official day is December 31<sup>st</sup> however I will continue to serve my fellow New Mexicans as we face unprecedented water supply challenges in the coming years. It has been a great privilege working on behalf of the Board of Directors to serve District water users, the six MRG Pueblos, non-irrigating property owners, our employees, the many local governments the District engages with, and the general public. The operative word of our title is Middle, and we certainly are in the middle of many important and life sustaining issues. I have thoroughly enjoyed the last seven years serving as your Chief Engineer & Chief Executive Officer and this experience has prepared me well for my next challenge.

Knowing that I would retire at some point, the Board has been very supportive of our efforts at succession planning and has encouraged recruitment of top notch staff to not only take on the increased workload in a highly professional manner but be positioned to assume leadership positions when us old dogs decide to move on. This is indeed the case so I am very confident the District will be in good hands for years to come as we face the many challenges before us. I will now become a constituent of the District on my little farm in Corrales.

Sincerely,



Mike A. Hamman, PE  
Chief Engineer/CEO

*For more information about the District and its programs please check out the website at [www.mrgcd.com](http://www.mrgcd.com) or reach out to District personnel at (505) 247-0234.*