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**For Immediate Release: August 1, 2013**

## **NEW WATER POLL: NM Voters Oppose Gila River Diversion Project in Favor of Long-term Solutions that Protect Rivers**

*Results come as State of New Mexico considers diversion of 14,000 acre feet of water from the Gila River*

**[CONFERENCE CALL WITH POLLSTER LORI WEIGEL FOR DETAILED ANALYSIS OF POLL RESULTS](#)**

**10AM MT TODAY**

**STEP 1: TO JOIN THE ONLINE MEETING, [CLICK HERE](#)**

**STEP 2: TO JOIN TELECONFERENCE, DIAL: 1-866-3859623 PROVIDE CONFERENCE CODE: 262 942 2908**

After three failed attempts to dam and divert the Gila over the past 50 years, New Mexico voters have been asked for the first time whether or not they support the diversion project and would be willing to pay higher taxes to facilitate its construction.

A new poll conducted by Republican polling firm Public Opinion Strategies reveals that New Mexico voters are overwhelming in favor of protecting rivers for people and wildlife, and that opposition to the proposed Gila River diversion is rooted in that preference. The poll shows that New Mexicans are gravely concerned about the health of rivers and overall water issues in the state, believe that rivers are critical to quality of life, and reject the concept of river diversions in favor of non-diversion alternatives. The poll (see attached) was commissioned by the business network *Protect the Flows* and is released at a time when the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) is considering whether to utilize federal funding under the Arizona Water Settlements Act to divert 14,000 acre feet of water from the Gila River -- or to pursue non-diversion conservation alternatives. The ISC will make their final recommendations to the Bureau of Reclamation no later than December 2014.

“When asked how to address the issue of water, New Mexicans are clear: they prefer exhausting non-diversion alternatives before turning to river diversions,” said pollster Lori Weigel, Partner with Public Opinion Strategies. “Voters initially were fairly divided, but the more respondents heard about the specific Gila River diversion project, the less they tended to support it.”

85% of voters favor using our current water supply more wisely, by continuing to conserve water, using new technology to help reduce wasted water, and increasing recycling of water. Examples of preferred more cost effective measures include: increasing conservation at home by using drought resistant plants, replacing outdated water infrastructure to reduce leaks and, water-saving irrigation incentives for farmers and ranchers.

When initially asked, just under half of state voters indicate support for “the state of New Mexico helping to fund the construction of a pipeline to divert water from the Gila River in western New Mexico over the Continental Divide to cities and farms in southwestern New Mexico.” But support diminishes to 36% statewide after voters hear a brief explanation of why diversion is being considered and what it would entail. Overall, support for the pipeline is well below majority levels in every region of the state. Moreover, fewer than one-in-three say are willing to pay more in taxes in order to fund construction of a pipeline to divert water from the Gila River.

"New Mexicans of all political stripes are rejecting the idea of river diversions and believe all other reasonable options should be explored first. Taxpayers believe the \$300 million price tag to divert water from the Gila River is too much to pay for a temporary fix," said Molly Mugglestone, Co-Director with Protect the Flows. “Governor Martinez has an important decision to make concerning the future of water in New Mexico, and she's going to hear from a lot of different interests. We hope that having this measure of opinion from New Mexico taxpayers helps inform her decision making process.”

The survey also showed that voters are more likely to view the project as a “band-aid”, with a solid 69 percent majority viewing the project as “a temporary fix” that won’t address the long-term water needs of the state. The Gila River diversion project is estimated to cost over 300 million dollars – leaving New Mexico taxpayers and water users to cover approximately 200 million dollars.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation’s recently released [Colorado River Basin Water Supply and Demand Study](#), in which the State of New Mexico was a co-author, concluded that conservation and water re-use are cheaper, easier and quicker to implement as a means to balancing water supply and demand. Ms. Mugglestone stated, “Support of a diversion project would be inconsistent with the State’s own report, released less than a year ago.”

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*Protect the Flows is a network of nearly 900 businesses, including 150 in New Mexico, who depend on healthy rivers and support the protection of the Colorado River system and the \$26 billion dollar recreation economy and quarter million American jobs that recreation on the river system supports. Members of Protect the Flows own and operate businesses in communities along the Colorado River and its tributaries (including the Gila) in Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, California, Nevada, and New Mexico.*