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Concern for Wildlife Habitat, Outdoor Recreation Economy Prompts Letter to Governor
Diverse NM Sportsmen Groups Oppose Controversial Gila Diversion Project

Santa Fe, NM -- On Friday November 15, eleven sportsmen groups representing 20,000 New Mexicans will send a letter to Governor Susana Martinez asking her to oppose the controversial Gila River diversion project in favor of long-term solutions that protect rivers. Protected and flowing rivers are essential for New Mexico's world-class elk habitat and gold medal fisheries, which support a \$2.89 billion river-related recreation economy.

"The Gila region is truly unique, in large part due to the presence of this amazing, living river," said Jeff Arterburn, President, Gila/Rio Grande Chapter of Trout Unlimited. "While there are many places across the country where anglers can fish for rainbow and brown trout, this is it for our beautiful native Gila trout, and we feel it is our responsibility, to our families and those visitors who are drawn to this special place, to protect and preserve the life of this river."

This collaborative outreach from multiple sportsmen groups is rare, but it serves to illustrate the widespread support for a flowing and un-diverted Gila River, favored by a majority of New Mexicans.

The groups -- which include the NM Wildlife Federation, Albuquerque Wildlife Federation, and numerous Trout Unlimited chapters in the state -- are sending the letter to the Governor on Friday morning, coinciding with an announcement and distribution of the letter at the Water and Natural Resources Committee meeting held at the state capitol in Santa Fe. At the meeting, Ryan Flynn, Secretary-Designate at the Department of Environment will be speaking on the state's Initiative on River Restoration, a program championed by the Governor.

"I understand the interim committee will be discussing the Governor's River Stewards Initiative on Thursday," said David Soules of Southwest Consolidated Sportsmen. "We are encouraged by her ambitious plan to protect river health in New Mexico and hope that this translates into protecting the Gila from a large scale diversion that would ultimately threaten river health and the outdoor recreation opportunities enjoyed by thousands of New Mexico sportsmen."

In addition to sportsmen concerns, the negative impacts of a diversion project on the Gila River are underscored by a recent polling of New Mexico voters revealing that New Mexicans are gravely concerned about the health of rivers, believe that rivers are critical to quality of life, and reject the concept of river diversions in favor of non-diversion. More specifically, a large

majority of NM voters oppose the controversial Gila River diversion project in favor of long-term solutions that protect rivers.

The poll, conducted by Republican polling firm Public Opinion Strategies in July 2013, illuminated six big picture findings:

1. New Mexico voters are very concerned about water issues.
2. New Mexicans value their rivers as critical to their quality of life, outdoor recreation opportunities, and the state's economy.
3. Voters decisively reject the concept and the specifics of a river diversion project.
4. The more New Mexico voters hear, the less they like the Gila River project
5. Water supply options other than diversion, such as water-saving irrigation systems for farmers and ranchers, replacing outdated water infrastructure, and building desalinization plants, are greeted with much more enthusiasm.
6. The huge pricetag for a pipeline is a major concern with only 30% willing to pay for the diversion project.

“In times of drought the only source of water for animals in the area is the Gila River, the golden thread of the Gila Wilderness. Any river diversion would cause serious harm to wildlife and threaten our outdoor recreation economy,” said Jason Amaro, a NM Wildlife Federation board member. “A diverse sportsmen coalition agrees with most of New Mexico that a diversion is a bad idea. We trust that this strong sentiment across the state leads to the rejection of this very counter-productive project.”

Three sportsmen are available for additional comment and interviews:

Jason Amaro - NM Wildlife Federation board member based in Silver City, 505-235-7762

David Soules - Southwest Consolidated Sportsmen in Las Cruces

575-522-1714 home; 575-644-3322 cell

Jeff Arterburn – President, Gila/Rio Grande Chapter of Trout Unlimited (Las Cruces),

575-646-2738

The letter to the governor is attached in a PDF file.