News Release

For Release August 21, 2014

CONTACTS:
Stacy Tellinghuisen, Senior Water and Energy Program Analyst
(505)820-1590, stacy@westernresources.org
Jorge Figueroa, Water Policy Analyst
(505)820-1590, jorge.figueroa@westernresources.org

New Report: Conservation and Reuse in Southwestern New Mexico Would Save Taxpayers and Ratepayers Millions of Dollars Annually

Analysis Shows Proposed Diversion on Gila River Unnecessary When More Reliable and Affordable Alternatives Meet Future Water Needs

(New Mexico) Western Resource Advocates released a detailed report today that shows the cheapest and fastest strategies to meet Southwestern New Mexico’s current and future community water needs are conservation and reuse. A proposed Gila River diversion plan, on the other hand, would likely cost water rate payers $710-900 a year. If taxpayers pay the costs of the proposed diversion this would be estimated at a cost of $145 for every man, woman and child in the state.

The new report is entitled: Filling the Gap: Meeting Future Urban and Rural Water Needs in Southwestern New Mexico. The report shows that the proposed Gila diversion project, despite a committed federal subsidy under the Arizona Water Settlements Act (AWSA), would still burden ratepayers in SW New Mexico or state tax payers with $300 million needed to cover project costs, as well as additional annual operating costs of over $6 million. New analysis of what this means if ratepayers covered the diversion cost shows this would triple household annual waters bill from an estimated $200 a year to over $670 a year. If the local population grows at a slower rate than anticipated, the average household’s water bill could quadruple to $800 per year. If ratepayers do not pay for the diversion, state taxpayers would be asked to cover the capital costs, which equates to $145 per resident of New Mexico.

“Our report shows that there are better, significantly cheaper ways to meet the water supply gap than a Gila River diversion,” said Stacy Tellinghuisen, Senior Energy/Water Policy Analyst at Western Resource Advocates and lead researcher on the new report. “Ratepayers and state taxpayers should not be asked to foot this exorbitant bill when there are less expensive options that provide a reliable future water supply for Southwestern New Mexico.”

Researchers found that the water supply ‘gap’ between cities’ water supplies and new demands is only 35 acre feet and this amount can be entirely met with currently available water conservation practices and strategies. One acre foot of water is 325,851 gallons, the amount of water three (3)
families utilize in one (1) year. The research also found that adding investments in recycled water, and irrigation water rights that cities already own and plan to convert to municipal use would provide 7,000 acre feet of additional water after meeting 2050 demands. Specifically,

- **Urban water conservation.** Southwest New Mexico’s communities can reduce water demands by an average of 33% through water conservation programs. This can provide 2,370 acre-feet of water per year to meet new demand by 2050, enough water for over 5000 families a year.

- **Reuse or recycled water.** Reuse or recycled water supply projects in Southwestern New Mexico could supply approximately 1,090 acre feet of water per year by 2050, enough water for over 2000 families a year.

- **Transfer water rights.** Cities in the region own and plan to transfer agricultural water rights to municipal uses. The City of Deming owns 3,780 acre-feet of irrigation water rights that it intends to convert to municipal use in the future. Even though Deming’s planned transfers do not exemplify the most flexible and innovative strategies, the City of Deming’s water supply plans need to be accounted for in a regional water supply and demand gap assessment.

Reuse and recycling, conservation and other non-diversion projects can receive funding through the Arizona Water Settlements Act.

“We call on the Governor’s Interstate Stream Commission to meet the Southwestern water supply gap by prioritizing water conservation and maximizing the role of reuse. This will save taxpayers money, ensure a strong recreational economy, and protect the Gila River for future generations to enjoy,” said Jorge Figueroa, Water Policy Analyst with Western Resource Advocates.

Western Resource Advocates’ researchers reviewed population projections published by the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission and applied per capita water use rates to project future water demand. Researchers then quantified available water supply strategies and currently proposed projects based on published literature and standard practice. For more details on methodology please read the full report and/or contact the lead authors.

For the Executive Summary and/or full report, please click here

---

For the last 25 years Western Resource Advocates has been the West’s premier group of experts protecting the region’s air, land and water. With offices in six western states, Western Resource Advocate’s pragmatic team of lawyers, scientists and economists craft innovative solutions for the most complex natural resource challenges in the region. The organization shapes a clean energy future that reduces pollution, protects our unique western lands, and addresses climate change. The organization restores degraded rivers and champions solutions to ensure a reliable water future. Go to [www.westernresourceadvocates.org](http://www.westernresourceadvocates.org) and follow us on Twitter @WRADV.