

**AMIGOS BRAVOS ♦ NEW MEXICO TROUT ♦ NEW MEXICO WILDLIFE
FEDERATION ♦ NEW MEXICO BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS AND ANGLERS ♦
WESTERN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER**

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact:

- Rudy Rios, New Mexico Trout, 505.730.1719
- Rachel Conn, Amigos Bravos, 575.770.8327
- Erik Schlenker-Goodrich, Western Environmental Law Center, 575.613.4197

**NEW MEXICO'S WATER QUALITY CONTROL COMMISSION APPROVES
HISTORIC PROTECTIONS FOR STATE'S MOST SPECIAL WATERS**

On Tuesday, November 30th, the Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) designated many of New Mexico's most important rivers, streams, and wetlands located in U.S. Forest Service Wilderness Areas as "Outstanding National Resource Waters" (ONRWs). The designations join the only other two ONRWs in the state, the Rio Santa Barbara and the Waters of the Valle Vidal. The WQCC also approved revisions to the rules protecting these special waters proposed by the New Mexico Environment Department, conservation groups, and the San Juan Water Commission.

"We applaud the WQCC's decision to protect New Mexico's headwaters. These ONRW protections will provide impressive water quality protections for not only these headwaters, but downstream towns, ranchers, farmers, and others," said Rachel Conn with Amigos Bravos. "The decision respects the people's connection to these waters by grandfathering pre-existing activities, such as acequia irrigation on the lands containing the ONRWs. Further, these protections focus attention on proactive water quality restoration activities."

The WQCC's decisions were not, however, unopposed. The New Mexico Cattle Growers Association and others sought to derail the public hearings by resorting to litigation, a tactic that was soundly rejected by the New Mexico Supreme Court on October 28, 2010. There are concerns that the Cattle Growers will again resort to litigation and other adversarial tactics to roll back the WQCC's decisions.

"There's a time and place for seeking redress in our courts," said Erik Schlenker-Goodrich, an attorney with the Western Environmental Law Center who represented Amigos Bravos, New Mexico Wildlife Federation, New Mexico Trout, and New Mexico Backcountry Hunters and Anglers. "But this isn't the time or place, and it is my hope that the Cattle Growers instead work with the conservation community to implement these clean water protections. Further litigation by the Cattle Growers – or a hostile back-door legislative effort – will only incite ill-advised division."

"Now that the WQCC has acted, it's time to put boots on the ground to protect and restore water quality, working with federal and state agencies, as well as all others who share our love for New Mexico's rivers, streams, and waters, including the Cattle Growers," said Rudy Rios with New Mexico Trout. "We need to work together. But if the Cattle Growers take divisive action, we will not hesitate to protect these hard fought clean water victories. We hope they choose wisely."