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October 19, 2014

Rep. Don L. Tripp Via U.S. Mail & email

P.O. Box 1369 trippsdon@netscape.net

Socorro, NM 87801

Re: Gila River: Proposed Diversion of the River & Dam Project

Dear Representative Tripp:

 I am writing to you today to express my profound concerns about the proposed diversion and damming of the Gila River in southwest New Mexico, the last free-flowing river in the state. The Interstate Stream Commission ("ISC") is currently considering a project to dam and divert approximately 14,000 acre feet of water annually from the river.

According a report by the federal Bureau of Reclamation in July of 2014, the proposed dam project is estimated to cost over $1.1 billion taxpayer dollars for construction and initial operating costs. In return, according to the engineering firm hired by the ISC, RJH Consultants, little or **no usuable water** for New Mexico farms, towns and cities will be generated. Moreover, the cost of operating and maintaining the dam will fall on New Mexico taxpayers, in particular, water users such as the town of Deming, NM and surrounding farms and ranches.

Contrary to the mis-characterizations of many, under the Arizona Water Settlement Act, New Mexico has the right, if it so chooses, to purchase water from Arizona tribes in exchange for water to be diverted from the Colorado River. New Mexico will pay the Bureau of Reclamation ("BRC") $146 per acre-foot of water of Gila River water diverted to Arizona, for which the BRC will thereafter deliver an equal amount of Colorado River water to New Mexico.

Mr. Tripp, very few stand to benefit under this proposed river diversion and dam project. The dam will damage, if not destroy, the livelihoods of many New Mexico farmers and ranchers in the southwest part of the state dependent upon water from the Gila River, many of whom operate small family-owned farms and ranches. Given the projected costs of construction, operation and maintenance, it is reasonably foreseeable that many of these farmers and ranchers will not be able to afford the cost of water once the dam is built.

In addition, the dam will wreak havoc upon the river's fish, migrating birds, and wildlife as habitat will be either destroyed or damaged. Those who enjoy the outdoors and such recreational activities as fishing, rafting, kayaking, or just hiking along the beautiful river will find such opportunities considerably diminished. Further, as detailed in the report of RJH Consultants, the reservoir sites as planned will hold little water, due to evaporation and seepage. The ISC has failed to take into consideration the environmental damage the proposed river diversion and dam project will bring.

New Mexico taxpayers, farmers, ranchers and municipal water users will bear the brunt of the costs of this poorly conceived and designed project. There are viable conservation alternatives which have been proposed -- alternatives which will not only save an estimated ***15,000 acre-feet*** of water per year, but for which federal funds are available. In other words, not only will New Mexico taxpayers **not**  have to spend a dime, but they will end up with more water than that projected to be produced by the Gila River project under consideration by the ISC.

Mr. Tripp, these alternatives warrant serious consideration and discussion. I ask you to oppose the Gila River dam and diversion. I also respectfully request your consideration of these alternatives, alternatives that make sense not only for those who live, work, and farm in southwest New Mexico and who are dependent upon the Gila River, but for all New Mexico taxpayers.

Should you or any member of your staff wish to speak to me further about this matter, please feel free to call me at (505) 471-3302 (h) or (505) 501-2494 (c). Thank you.

 Sincerely,

 */s/Deborah M. DeMack*

 Deborah M. DeMack