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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT



SPONSOR: Rodella DATE TYPED: 02/07/02 HB HM-17

SHORT TITLE: El Rito Reservoir SB _____

ANALYST: Chabot

APPROPRIATION

Appropriation Contained		Estimated Additional Impact		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY02	FY03	FY02	FY03		
	NFI				

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files
 Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department
 New Mexico Environment Department (NMED)
 New Mexico Finance Authority
 Office of the Natural Resources Trustee
 Office of the State Engineer (OSE)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Memorial 17 resolves that the New Mexico congressional delegation be requested to consider federal financing of a reservoir in the El Rito area to supply farmers on the acequia with irrigation water that otherwise drains into the El Rito River, the Rio Chama and the Rio Grande.

Significant Issues

Most of the precipitation in the El Rito area is in the winter months when there is little need for irrigation and the water runs off into adjacent stream systems. The memorial proposes being a reservoir to store this water for use during the growing season. If effectively managed, a reservoir may help to alleviate water shortages during times of high use. The federal authorities would have to do an assessment of the need for a dam, environmental concerns and benefits to the surrounding area in determining the viability of building a reservoir in this area.

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OSE states the El Rito area and the Rio Chama area between Abiquiu and Espanola are under the jurisdiction of a water master who administers water rights according to priority dates in times of insufficient water supply. This area has been adjudicated. In order to construct a reservoir, an application to store water would have to be submitted to OSE and that application could be subject to protest delaying its consideration. In addition, storage water rights would be junior to all others in the area because they would be based upon that application date. The United States Bureau of Reclamation did a study about two years ago for a dam site in the Canjilon area and obtaining additional water rights were a major consideration.

NMED is concerned that a dam would have potential adverse impacts on surface water quality, riparian vegetation and wildlife habitat. Numerous streams in the El Rito watershed are high-quality, cold water fisheries and support populations of trout. Constructions of a reservoir could impact their habitat.

These concerns would have to be addressed in an environmental impact statement when and if the federal government decided to study the possibility of building a reservoir in the El Rito area.

GAC/njw