



**Southwest Program Office**

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June 10, 2022

New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission  
1190 Saint Francis Drive  
Suite # South 2102  
Santa Fe, NM 87505  
[Pamela.Jones@state.nm.us](mailto:Pamela.Jones@state.nm.us)

RE: WQCC 21-62(R) – Outstanding Waters Designations for Rio Hondo, Lake Fork of the Rio Hondo, Upper Rio Grande, and Jemez River Headwaters (Rio San Antonio, East Fork Jemez River, and Redondo Creek)

Dear Water Quality Control Commissioners:

Defenders of Wildlife supports protecting the Rio Hondo, Lake Fork of the Rio Hondo, Upper Rio Grande, and Jemez River Headwaters (Rio San Antonio, East Fork Jemez River, and Redondo Creek) as Outstanding National Resources Waters (ONRWs). The nominated waters are rich with ecological resources and have important cultural and recreational significance. Protecting these waters will ensure their water quality is protected for current and future generations.

Defenders of Wildlife is a national, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities. Defenders of Wildlife is committed to protecting wildlands and wildlife in New Mexico and has 2.2 million members and supporters, 21,900 of which call New Mexico home. Our Southwest program works with diverse partners to protect aquatic and riparian areas throughout the region.

ONRW designation of the more than 125 miles of nominated streams would protect the ecological, cultural, and recreational significance of these water bodies. The nominated waters provide vital habitat for a myriad of state and federal endangered and threatened species, state species of greatest conservation need, and special status species. For example, the Upper Rio Grande Gorge supports a population of the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*), which is closely associated with healthy riparian areas. San Antonio and Redondo Creeks provide federally designated critical habitat for the Jemez Mountains salamander (*Plethodon neomexicanus*) and New Mexico meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius luteus*), both of which are federal and state endangered species that rely on healthy riparian areas for survival. The petitioned waters also support a population of New Mexico's endemic Rio Grande cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkia virginalis*), a candidate for federal endangered species protection. Overall, at least 35 special status animal species inhabit the area within or around the nominated waters.

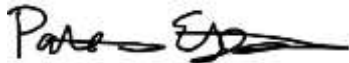
Local communities also depend on clean water from the nominated river and stream segments to feed their acequia systems. For generations farmers have irrigated their crops with water from the Rio Hondo, Upper Rio Grande, and Jemez watershed. ONRW designation will ensure that clean

water continues to flow downstream and protect this traditional use from new development and impacts.

Finally, the nominated waters provide exceptional recreational opportunities for New Mexicans and visitors alike. Anglers, rafters, hikers, and hunters flock to the petitioned waters year-round to experience the unique beauty, world class rafting, and cold-water fishing of New Mexico. Protecting the nominated waters will ensure they remain prime recreation destinations for New Mexican and visitors.

Defenders of Wildlife fully supports protecting the Rio Hondo, Lake Fork of the Rio Hondo, Upper Rio Grande, and Jemez River Headwaters (Rio San Antonio, East Fork Jemez River, and Redondo Creek) and urges the Commission to designate these waters as ONRWs.

Sincerely,



Patricia Estrella  
New Mexico Representative  
Defenders of Wildlife