



February 15, 2022

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Water Quality Control Commission
1190 Saint Francis Drive
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Pamela.Jones@state.nm.us

Re: WQCC 21-62(R) – Outstanding National Resource 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,

American Rivers supports the Outdoor Recreation Division's petition to protect the following as Outstanding Waters (ONRWs): 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). ONRW designation of these waters will ensure that water quality is protected for generations to come.

American Rivers believes a future of clean water and healthy rivers for everyone, everywhere is essential. Since 1973, we have protected wild rivers, restored damaged rivers, and conserved clean water for people and nature. With headquarters in Washington, D.C., and 300,000 supporters, members, and volunteers across the country, we are the most trusted and influential river conservation organization in the United States. Our Southwest River Protection Program utilizes a suite of strategies with diverse partners to inform, protect, and celebrate the long-term resilience of the most ecologically and culturally important rivers across New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and Arizona. As such, American Rivers is invested in durable protections for these nominated waters in northern New Mexico.

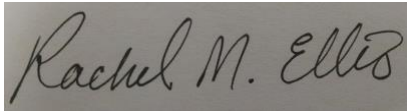
ONRW designation of the 125.9 miles of nominated streams would recognize the recreational, cultural, and ecological significance of these six water bodies. Designation will support and protect existing community uses, such as ranching and farming, while prohibiting new pollution from impacting the watershed. For generations, the local community has depended on clean water in the Rio Hondo, Upper Rio Grande, and Jemez watersheds to water livestock and feed acequia systems. This designation will ensure that clean water continues to flow downstream to these critical stakeholders and protect these traditional uses from new development and impacts.

These waters are rich with ecological resources, and they also provide significant recreational opportunities for both New Mexicans and visitors alike. Indeed, within the petition's nominated waters, 52.2 miles of the Rio Grande and 11 miles of the East Fork Jemez River are already

designated under the national Wild and Scenic Rivers Act for their outstanding values. ONRW designation complements and strengthens, but does not duplicate, water quality protections for these Wild and Scenic Rivers. In fact, by increasing the reaches of protected rivers through the proposed ONRW nominations, these invaluable Wild and Scenic Rivers will have their water quality protected at watershed scale. In addition, ONRW protections will help draw much needed attention for restoration, and water and fuel management projects throughout these watersheds.

American Rivers enthusiastically supports the efforts to ensure 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) will continue to provide clean water to New Mexico's communities and wildlife.

Sincerely,

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature reads "Rachel M. Ellis" in a cursive script.