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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, June 3, 2011

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SUMNER LAKE BOATING UPDATE

FORT SUMNER –State Park officials will make a determination on opening Sumner Lake to boating after the Carlsbad Irrigation District Board meeting on June 14th. This meeting will determine how much water the Board will request from Sumner and Santa Rosa reservoirs and the timing of those releases. The Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will then use this information to plan for releases related to interstate water delivery obligations and Endangered Species Act commitments. Depending on the size of the release, it is possible that the water level would drop below the elevation of the boating ramps, which would keep boats from launching.

New Mexico State Parks closed Sumner Lake to all watercraft use on May 27 after laboratory test results found indications of aquatic invasive species. State and federal agencies agreed that the action was necessary to keep boaters from moving Sumner Lake water and, potentially, Quagga mussel veligers, to other reservoirs. Personnel from State Parks and Game and Fish decontaminated 18 boats and three personal watercraft after the closure went into effect.

“Boating at Sumner Lake is closed for now, but Sumner Lake State Park is open and offers many recreational activities, such as camping, hiking, swimming, wildlife viewing and bank fishing,” said Tommy Mutz, Director of State Parks. “We want to do everything we can to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species, but we want to remind the public that the park is open.”

The decontamination process is necessary because regularly scheduled tests of the lake by the Bureau of Reclamation found indications of Quagga mussel veligers, or larva. This test result was confirmed by an independent laboratory, increasing the likelihood of Sumner Lake being designated New Mexico’s first lake infested with the mussels.

Tod Stevenson, Director of the Department of Game and Fish, said that one more positive test at Sumner would force him to declare Sumner infested. The Department and Bureau of Reclamation are currently analyzing additional samples from Sumner Lake and are developing broader sampling strategies. Currently, three of the Four Corner states already have at least one infested lake or reservoir.

“This is a very serious designation with huge implications for the way everyone has been doing business at Sumner Lake,” Stevenson said. “There’s no stepping back once we declare it infested, so I want to have irrefutable proof the lake is infested before we move ahead with this designation. Based on the information we currently have, if Sumner Lake re-opens to boating we are going to treat the lake as if it is infested and

implement decontamination procedures to minimize the chance that boaters and anglers transfer water from Sumner Lake to other water bodies.”

Quagga mussels are classified an Aquatic Invasive Species in North America. They are indigenous to the Dneiper River drainage of the Ukraine, and are believed to have come to the United States in the bilge tanks of ships. They were first discovered in the Great Lakes region of the United States in the 1980s, but quickly moved west.

Anglers also need to drain and dry all bait buckets and other equipment that may carry Sumner Lake water to other locations.

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