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NEWS RELEASE

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Day Use Area at Leasburg Dam to Close Beginning Sept. 8 for Trail Construction

New ADA-Compliant Trail to Offer Access for Fishing, Hiking, Education

RADIUM SPRINGS, N.M. – The river day use area at Leasburg Dam State Park will close to the public from Sept. 8, 2009 – Jan. 15, 2010 to ensure visitor safety during trails construction in the area. The rest of the park will remain open, including the campground, playground, and group area. The work will make the trail compliant with the American Disabilities Act (ADA) by adding an accessible hard surface trail, fishing platforms, picnic sites and new restrooms. In addition, two footbridges will be installed, allowing hikers and mountain bikers access to the upper campground and an extensive existing trail system that connects to nearby Ft. Selden State Monument.

“The dream is coming together,” said Park Manager Evaristo Giron. “The park and the monument will be connected and I really see the accessible trail being used extensively by community members.”

The project must be completed by Dec. 31, 2009 to meet the requirements of a federal grant that is paying for the project. Most of the construction time frame is slated for the park’s slow visitation period from October – December to minimize the impact of the closure on the public. The day use area will house construction materials such as base course and gravel chips as well as heavy equipment. Much of the construction will be completed by park staff, which will build the trails, shelters and pour concrete parking pads. Contractors will install the restrooms and foot bridges.

“There is tremendous talent among the park staff in this region and they are taking this on as a fun project,” said Giron. “We will make use of staff expertise in pouring concrete and other skilled work.”

The new trail section will connect a riverside riparian habitat to Chihuahuan Desert bluffs overlooking the river via a loop trail. The ADA-compliant trail section along the river will be called the “Mogollon Trail,” where visitors may stop to picnic or fish at two accessible spots.

“We picked two areas that local anglers call ‘holes’ where fish are known to bite,” said Giron. “We didn’t want fishing access points at places where they’d just be drowning a worm!”

Leasburg Dam State Park is an *ecotone* –a place where two habitats meet together – inviting a diverse array of flora and fauna in close proximity. Trail users may enjoy the animal and plant life as well as beautiful vistas. The trail also will connect with the 1800s-era Ft. Selden State Monument, which housed soldiers who provided settlers protection from Apache resistance.

“This will offer some great educational opportunities for local school groups to begin their tour at the monument and take the trail down to Leasburg Dam,” said Giron. “We can point out changes in the ecosystem and how birds and other wildlife use that corridor.”

This Mogollon Trail project is funded with \$248,000 from the federal Recreational Trails Program, \$50,000 from New Mexico General Fund money allocated in 2007 for work on the Rio Grande Trail; and \$12,000 from the park's budget for a total of \$310,000.

Leasburg Dam State Park is located 15 miles north of Las Cruces on I-25. Take exit 19, turn left and take N.M. 157 west to the park entrance. The park has attractive picnic and camping facilities on the Rio Grande, a modern restroom with showers, a playground, and a new visitor center with exhibits. The park offers camping, picnicking and bird watching as well as fishing, canoeing and kayaking from mid-March to mid-October. For more information, call 575-524-4068 or visit www.nmparks.com.

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The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department provides resource protection and renewable energy resource development services to the public and other state agencies.

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