Secretary Prukop Plans for State Park Closures, Reduce Services Due to Budget Cuts

Employee Furloughs, Few Inspections also Planned

Santa Fe, NM – Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Cabinet Secretary Joanna Prukop announced today that she is making plans to shut down several state parks and cut services to New Mexicans in anticipation of a 7.6 percent budget decrease passed by the Legislature.

The budget plan, which awaits Governor Richardson’s action, would result in a $1.9 million cut to the department’s budget, which was already cut by 5 percent or $1.3 million earlier this year. Secretary Prukop is planning for employee furloughs to help deal with the budget cuts.

“A 7.6 percent budget decrease on top of the 5 percent decrease the Legislature already imposed on our department forces a reduction in services across the board for all divisions,” stated Secretary Prukop. “The cuts will have a dramatic impact on this agency’s ability to serve the citizens of New Mexico and to ensure the protection of the environment.”

The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department includes State Parks, State Forestry, Oil Conservation, Mining and Minerals, and the Energy Conservation and Management divisions. In addition the agency provides guidance to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant Transportation Safety Project, Youth Conservation Corps, and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

There are currently 69 vacancies at Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources, including 42 positions at State Parks, all of which will go unfilled due to the hiring freeze and budget cuts. Due to the already implemented 5 percent cut, State Parks has closed Bluewater Lake State Park for the winter and there is potential for more parks to close across the state.

The Oil Conservation Division currently has 11 vacancies, out of 68 total positions statewide and may have to furlough employees one day each pay period. Among other impacts, this will cause a 66 percent reduction in the number of field inspections at oil and gas facilities, which places the environment and groundwater at risk.
The state budget cuts will lead to a loss of millions of dollars in federal funding due to the inability to meet matching funds requirements. The department risks losing federal grant money for mine reclamation, clean energy and state park programs.

“These service reductions will impact New Mexicans,” stated Secretary Prukop. “Due to furloughs and vacancies throughout the department, the public can expect delays in processing applications, financial payments, permitting, contracts and agreements.”

The proposed legislation will have the following impact on services:

**State Parks**
- 42 job vacancies, 25 of which are law enforcement positions, will not be filled
- Full or partial park closures statewide
- Potential employee furloughs
- Potential loss of federal grant worth up to $1.3 million due to lack of state matching funds
- Reduced maintenance of grounds, trails and structures
- Inability to provide sanitary conditions in parks statewide
- Potential loss of American Zoological Association accreditation.

**Oil Conservation**
- 11 job vacancies
- All employees furloughed one day per pay period
- Delays in processing all new applications to drill for oil and gas
- Forced well shut-ins until paperwork is processed
- Reduced operator assistance for research or reporting issues
- 66 percent reduction in routine field inspections, placing environment and groundwater at risk
- Reduced inspections for Water Quality Control Discharge permitted facilities
- Potential loss of federal grant that protects underground drinking water due to lack of matching funds.

**Program Support**
- 7 job vacancies
- Delays in processing all financial documents, including payments to vendors
- Furlough of 41 employees
- All documents available only electronically
- Reduced information technology support for systems and services department-wide
- Reduced legal review for all permitting, contracts and agreements.

**State Forestry**
- 6 job vacancies
- Community Wildfire Protection Plan development reduced by 25 percent
- Timber harvest permit delays
- Reduced fire training for fire fighters and fire departments
- Fewer forest restoration projects statewide
- Fewer services to landowners in the rehabilitation of fire-devastated areas.
Mining and Minerals

- 2 job vacancies
- Vacant uranium position will remain vacant causing permit delays
- Fewer public meetings and hearings on permitting activities
- Potential loss of $1.7 million in federal funding for the regulation of coal mines, which requires a 28 percent state match
- Economic impacts to northwest New Mexico if potential mine projects are delayed.

Energy Conservation and Management Division

- 1 of 15 regular staff jobs vacant
- Delays in processing solar and sustainable building tax credit applications
- No non-federal state match funding available to apply for future federal funding opportunities
- No on-site monitoring for Clean Energy and Energy Innovation capital projects
- Reduced oversight of energy projects and claimed tax credits to prevent abuse and fraud
- Reduced on-site technical assistance for renewable energy, and building energy efficiency and transportation projects.

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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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