

Burning a year of glooms

Attendees shared their woes at the 101st iteration of Santa Fe's annual Burning of Zozobra. **Page 12A**



JULIA GOLDBERG/Source NM

Taylor Swift tribute hits Farmington

Farmington Civic Center will host the 'Are You Ready For It? A Taylor Experience' tour on Friday. **Page 2A**



Courtesy of Farmington Civic Center

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Settlement released in Texas v. N.M. Rio Grande lawsuit



SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN/Associated Press

A bicyclist traverses the Rio Grande's dry riverbed in Albuquerque on Aug. 21.

Four-part agreement addresses federal, state and irrigation district concerns

BY DANIELLE PROKOP
SOURCE NM

Parties in a legal dispute over Rio Grande water filed settlement documents Friday that could end a lawsuit that has been mired before the U.S. Supreme Court for the last 12 years and cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars.

The potential dismissal of the case would establish new rules in the stretch of Rio Grande below Elephant Butte, an area reshaped by water scarcity and agriculture.

The U.S. Supreme Court in June 2024 struck a previous

proposed settlement crafted between New Mexico, Texas and Colorado, ruling in a 5-4 decision that the settlement unfairly excluded the federal government's "unique federal interests," and sent the parties back to the negotiation tables in 2024.

In May, New Mexico, Texas, Colorado and the United States announced they were close to a settlement.

The agreement released Friday will provide a measure of stability and truly end the conflict, New Mexico's lead attorney in the case, Jeff Wechsler, told Source NM.

"I think it's a fair and appropriate resolution of a number of long-standing disputes in the Rio Grande, and I'm hopeful that it will really be the foundation for continued water use and prosperity in the region in both states," he said.

The parties provided the settlement to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit Chief Judge D. Brooks Smith, who oversees the case as a special master. Smith set a Sept. 29 hearing in Philadelphia to consider the proposal. Following the hearing, Smith will write a recommendation to the U.S. Supreme Court, which holds the power to issue a final decision.

A series of droughts in the early 2000s spurred a slew of lawsuits between irrigation dis-

tricts, local governments, state agencies and the federal Bureau of Reclamation over the splitting of the Rio Grande. The grievances carried into a 2011 federal lawsuit brought by New Mexico, which alleged the federal government's operations of a network of dams, canals and irrigation ditches favored Texas farmers and shorted New Mexico its rightful Rio Grande water.

In 2013, Texas elevated the dispute to the U.S. Supreme Court, and alleged that New Mexico's groundwater pumping from farming and development on the Rio Grande was taking tens of thousands of acre feet of water and violating the 87-year old compact between the states. The Supreme Court allowed the

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