**Presentation to the Public Utilities Commission – March 1, 2017**

**Dale Doremus, Santa Fe River Committee**

Good evening Chairman Rivera and Members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you tonight. My name is Dale Doremus and I am member of the Santa Fe River Commission (SFRC). I am a Hydrogeologist by training and my career has been primarily in water quality and water resources with the NM Environment Department, the City of Santa Fe Water Division and most recently the NM Interstate Stream Commission. I am presenting tonight on behalf of the SFRC and our Chairman, John Buchser, who could not attend this evening’s meeting.

In your packet (Item #10) you have a cover memo and a brief report with recommendations from the SF River Commission regarding the Santa Fe River Target Flow Ordinance and the Administrative Procedures. The focus of these recommendations is on concerns surrounding living river bypass flows in the vicinity of the former Two-Mile Reservoir and the Nature Conservancy’s River Preserve. These recommendations were also presented at a fairly lengthy public hearing of the Public Works Committee on February 6th.

The concerns regarding living river flows and the Santa Fe Canyon Preserve came to the attention of the River Commission during the summer of 2016. Over the last several months the River Commission has received significant input on various options for managing Living River bypass flows to the Preserve from River Commissioners, City staff, Acequia Madre, Acequia Cerro Gordo, the Santa Fe Watershed Association, local water experts, and other stakeholders. In addition, the December 14, 2016 report prepared by City staff titled “City’s Water and Living River Report” describes several options for river flows below Nichols Dam that could help address concerns regarding Living River bypass flows to the Preserve (Item 11, pages 19-24). The River Commission has concluded that all these options need to be evaluated in a comprehensive way that includes a legal analysis, a cost/benefit analysis and a thorough review of the potential impacts of various alternatives including impacts to downstream reaches of the river.

As a result of valuable input the River Commission has received over the past several months we have developed 6 recommendations to be implemented over the next 2 to 3 years (page 2 and 3 in Item 10 of your packet). I want to emphasize that these recommendations will build on previous and ongoing studies by the City and the recommendations are intended to lay out a process to reach a resolution that is effective and allows input from stakeholders and the community.

Our first recommendation is a near-term solution to address flows to the Preserve while further analysis of options can be considered with input from stakeholders and the public.

Recommendation 1a is to Direct Living River bypass flows to the Preserve via the historic channel at the rates provided for in the Administration Procedures adopted pursuant to Ordinance No. 2012-10 and seek to maintain a minimum flow of 0.3 cfs year round through the Preserve restoration channel.

This recommendation is time critical for the upcoming irrigation season. 2016 was the first irrigation season after the completion of the the newly constructed outlet works for Nichols Reservoir. As a result of this more efficient infrastructure, the seepage from the Dam has been considerably reduced. In the past, these seepage flows from Nichols have benefited the riparian ecosystem of the SF Canyon Preserve. The reduction in Dam seepage has introduced the unintended consequence of making it more difficult to maintain the biologically diverse area above the remnants of Two-Mile Dam within the Preserve. This is of particular concern during irrigation season when flows are diverted through the by-pass channel to meet acequia headgate deliveries. The River Commission understands the difficulty with current infrastructure for the City to precisely regulate flows to the Preserve; therefore our recommendation uses the language: “seek to maintain a weekly average of 0.3 cfs” flowing to the River Preserve year-round.

Our second short term Recommendation 1.b. is for the City of Santa Fe to pursue an agreement with The Nature Conservancy to allow The Nature Conservancy the option to purchase or lease raw (untreated) water from the City to augment the Preserve during periods when Living River bypass flows are unavailable.

Recommendation 2: The City Water Division is currently planning a seepage/water balance study of the Santa Fe Canyon Preserve area. The River Commission’s Recommendation 2 supports this study that will, in part, evaluate the interaction between the bypass channel and the Preserve and will help inform future water management decisions for the area.

Recommendation 3: the SFRC is recommending and offering assistance to the City in soliciting public input on the impact of current hydrologic conditions on Living River bypass flows and possible options to maintain the objectives of the Target Flow Ordinance. We feel that this community outreach effort should be ongoing throughout this process.

Recommendation 4: Upon completion of the City’s seepage/water balance studies in recommendation #2 above, and in conjunction with further feedback from the community, the River Commission recommends that an alternatives analysis and feasibility study be conducted to assess the various options in a comprehensive manner.

The River Commission recommends that the City initiate a Request for Proposals (likely in early FY-19) to study the feasibility and options associated with restoration of the historic river channel and infrastructure improvements to accommodate all river flows, including flood flows, through the historic channel. The study should include a legal analysis and cost analysis of various options, and an evaluation of operational, environmental, ecological, agricultural, and recreational impacts to the Preserve and to downstream reaches of the river.

Recommendation 5: The SFRC supports an analysis of the feasibility of aquifer storage and recovery, and the effect of Living River bypass flows on groundwater levels along the Santa Fe River. I note that aquifer storage and recovery option is included in table of options in the City’s Living River Report in item 11 in your packet.

Recommendation 6: The Santa Fe River Commission recommends making necessary revisions to the Administrative Procedures for Santa Fe River Target Flows that are based on results of the water balance and seepage studies and existing data combined with input from the public, stakeholders, City staff, and the Santa Fe River Commission.

Finally the River Commission wishes to thank the PUC for you consideration of these recommendations. We also want to thank and recognize all those who have provided assistance and input to our recommendations over the past several months: Melissa McDonald, City River and Watershed Coordinator, City of Santa Fe Water Division (Alan Hook and Alex Puglisi); the Santa Fe Watershed Association; Acequia Madre and Acequia Cerro Gordo; The Nature Conservancy; Watershed West; Previous SF River Commissioners; and members of the public.