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THE IMPACT OF GEOTHERMAL DEVELOPMENT IN DONA ANA COUNTY, NEW MEXICO

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The New Mexico Energy and Minerals Department is funding a program to help local governments prepare for the impact of the development and commercialization of geothermal energy. The governing bodies of the City of Las Cruces and the County of Dona Ana are participating in this pilot study being conducted by the Southern Rio Grande Council of Governments and the New Mexico Energy Institute at New Mexico State University.

New Mexico State University has identified several promising sites for the development of geothermal energy in Dona Ana County. The development and commercialization of geothermal energy can impact local governments in ways which they do not yet perceive or understand. Yet, local governments can plan for the future, and they do their planning by using citizen boards and committees. The technique used in this pilot study will incorporate this committee concept to get appropriate information to the governing bodies, their staffs, and the segments of the public most likely to be affected. If the technique proves to be successful, and we think it will, then this technique will be used in other areas of the state. By incorporating the public in this study, we believe that the distribution of knowledge on the resource and its utilization will hasten the commercialization of geothermal energy in Dona Ana County.

A two-tiered committee structure will be used, forming a policy committee and a technical committee. The members of the policy committee will be appointed by the governing bodies. The policy committee will develop a strategy for development and commercialization in the county and will submit a report to the governing bodies for their approval. The technical committee will be appointed by the Energy Institute. The technical committee will brief the policy committee on the current status of geothermal development in the county, the state-of-the-art of various technical areas, and the informational needs required to implement the recommended strategies. Thus, the policy committee will be the bridge between the technical experts

and the governing bodies.

The success of the study depends upon the effectiveness of the policy committee and the acceptance of its recommendations by the governing bodies. Therefore, the formation of the policy committee and the appointment process has received primary attention. The policy committee should also contain important interest groups, for example, the industrial development board, the chamber of commerce, financial institutions, homebuilders, agribusinessmen, affected utilities, and the university. The policy committee must be structured to ensure that both governments have equal representation. To meet these constraints, the policy committee will include five appointments from each governmental body. If any of the above named interest groups are not included in the initial appointments, the initial committee members will elect additional members to represent the excluded interest groups. Although this process may appear to be cumbersome, it is representative of the affected interest groups, it ensures equality between the two governmental bodies, and it fits the local political realities. Thus, the policy committee should be effective, and its policy recommendations should be accepted.

The technical committee will provide information to the policy committee, and in turn, will become more knowledgeable about the types of development and commercialization which are acceptable to the local community. The technical committee will be composed of experts in the fields of geophysics, civil and mechanical engineering, environment, economy, law, agricultural business, industrial management, and finance. The technical committee will provide appropriate technical information to the policy committee to ensure that the policy recommendations for development and commercialization are based upon technical realities.

After obtaining final approval on the committee structure from the local governments, the study will begin. First, the policy and technical committees will be formed. Second, the members of the technical committee will define the state-of-the-art for technical areas and will present the status of the current work in Dona Ana County. Third, the members of the policy committee will review the work of the technical committee and set preliminary policy objectives. Next, the members of the technical committee will develop position papers which will contain the informational needs required to meet policy

objectives. Finally, after considering the position papers, the policy committee will complete its policy recommendations and submit them to the two governing bodies for their approval.

The resulting documentation from this study will be a compilation of the local policy objectives and the informational needs for resource development and commercialization in Las Cruces and Dona Ana County. Additionally, the local governments and a large segment of the community will become aware of the potential future developments and how to react to them. Logically, the next step will be for the researchers to solve the informational deficiencies and for the developers to commercialize the geothermal resource.