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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

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TITLE: SAGE GROUSE CONSERVATION

The State Engineer's Office has announced that it is adding a step in its water right permit application review procedures to comply with Governor's Executive Order 2008-2. The executive order is intended to conserve greater sage grouse populations in the state and prevent listing of the species as a threatened or endangered species. Specifically, the executive order states, "New development on land uses within Core Population Areas should be authorized or conducted only when it can be demonstrated by the state agency that the activity will not cause declines in Greater Sage Grouse populations." Core Population Areas have been identified in the state and represent areas of critical habitat necessary to conserve the species.

Effective January 4, 2010, the State Engineer's Office will begin screening all new water right permit applications to determine if they are located within a defined Core Population Area. For those applications falling within a Core Population Area, the applicant will be notified of the need to conserve sage grouse and asked to select an option to accomplish this goal. Current options identified by the State Engineer's Office include the following:

- Relocate the proposed facility outside of a Core Population Area.

- The applicant may provide a biological assessment demonstrating that full development of the project will not impact sage grouse populations.
- The applicant agrees to a set of special permit conditions. Specifically:
 - No facilities or construction activities are allowed within 0.6 miles of the perimeter of an occupied sage grouse lek.
 - No construction shall take place in a Core Population Area in the March 15th to June 30th time frame.
- The applicant provides evidence that the proposed project will be located in a previously disturbed area such as farmstead or industrial site.
- For small agricultural facilities that support existing land uses and generate limited operation and maintenance activities, the applicant agrees to a special permit condition. Specifically:
 - No facilities or construction activities are allowed within 0.25 miles of the perimeter of an occupied sage grouse lek.

The State Engineer's Office looks forward to working with water right permit applicants as these procedures are implemented. Anyone with questions regarding this policy may contact the State Engineer's Office at 307-777-6150.