Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON – Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton and Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs David W. Anderson will be joined on July 8 by representatives of the Zuni Tribe of New Mexico and other departmental officials at a signing ceremony at the Interior Department's headquarters in Washington, D.C., to formalize the Zuni Indian Tribe Water Rights Settlement Agreement. The agreement, which Congress ratified and confirmed on June 23, 2003, resolves an Arizona state general stream adjudication over water rights in the Little Colorado River Basin that has been ongoing since 1979.

Since time immemorial, the Zuni people have used an area at the confluence of the Zuni and Little Colorado Rivers in northeastern Arizona for sustenance and religious purposes. Tribal religious leaders made regular pilgrimages from their homelands in New Mexico to the area to worship at the Sacred Lake located there and at surrounding springs, wetlands and riparian areas – sites at the core of Zuni religious beliefs, but threatened by significant deterioration as a result of development close by. In 1984, Congress established the Zuni Heaven Reservation to protect these sacred lands.

When signed, the agreement will resolve all of the Zuni Tribe's water rights claims in a way that satisfies the Tribe's needs without harming other water users, brings environmental restoration to the Zuni Heaven Reservation and provides $19.2 million to be used by the Tribe for riparian and wetlands restoration activities, including acquiring necessary state-based water rights from willing sellers.

WHO: Gale Norton, Secretary, Department of the Interior David W. Anderson, Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior Representatives of the Zuni Tribe of New Mexico

WHAT: Norton and Anderson will participate in the signing ceremony for the Zuni Indian Tribe Water Rights Settlement Agreement.

WHEN: Thursday, July 8, 2004, at 3:00 p.m. (EDT)

WHERE: Main Interior Building, South Penthouse, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

CREDENTIALS: Press registration will be provided. Please bring your sanctioned media credentials and if possible, wear on your shirt collar or around your neck for easy viewing. This will assist our staff. Press seating will be provided.