

Chevron applies for water rights transfer to Eagle Rock Lake

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Chevron is applying to the state for permission to reclassify and transfer 42-acre-feet of water rights to Eagle Rock Lake, the popular Questa fishing spot on the eastern edge of the village.

The company will formally submit its application Friday (March 30) to the Office of the State Engineer, the top water rights manager, according to a notice posted on the agency's website.

The transfer, the notice states, is necessary to offset water lost to evaporation in the newly renovated lake. As part of the EPA negotiated record of decision guiding cleanup efforts at the Superfund site, Chevron drained and rebuilt the contaminated lake and surrounding sidewalks and bridges between 2013 and 2015.

Tommy Lyles, Chevron's spokesperson for the former Questa molybdenum mine, told *The Taos News* Chevron regularly monitors the lake water levels and flows, which led to the decision to ask that water rights be allocated for the purpose.

One acre-foot of surface water works out to be about 325,800 gallons, or the amount of water necessary to cover a football field with one foot of water. The typical household uses about half an acre-foot of water in a year.

The surface area of the lake is about 3 acres.

According to the state engineer's notice, the water rights under consideration have been adjudicated, or legally allocated, for irrigation and are attached to 19 acres on two tracks of land owned by Chevron. The rights were attached to the Alvino Barela Ditch, owned by the U.S. Forest Service. If approved, those rights would be reclassified for recreational purposes.

No water rights were allocated for Eagle Rock Lake prior to the renovation, according to Lyles.

In April 2015, the state approved a temporary lease permit to transfer water rights to the lake: 26.3 acre-feet for the initial refilling and year of operation, and 8.75 acre-feet to make up for evaporation the following year, according to Lyles.

The current request is not an extension of those rights, but for different water rights.

The water would be diverted from the Red River through existing gates, Lyles said.

The public has until April 15 to submit protests about the proposal.