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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Susan Kelly's wonderful introduction to this *Natural Resources Journal* issue needs no introduction. Suffice it to say that there is no western water issue that so strikes fear into the heart of western water managers as the issue of the federal operation of dams and reservoirs on western rivers. There is also no issue that is so shrouded in the mystery of arcane operating agreements as are the operations of these facilities. This issue focuses on the dams and reservoirs of the New Mexico portion of the Rio Grande. The main stem of this most famous of western rivers is probably the least controlled by their operations. But when was the last time that you heard about releasing water from Elephant Butte Dam according to the "D-2 curve"? The D-2 curve for sometime now has controlled the relationship of storage in and releases from the ancient, huge federal facility. "Embedded," as they say, in that curve there lie many of the fundamental water policies implicating flood control, carryover storage, inter-state compacts, irrigation rights, return flows, groundwater pumping, minimum in-stream flows for endangered aquatic species, and most of the other always competing and often incompatible considerations in the operations of western rivers. This issue unpacks some of those issues and presents them in a contemporary light. The Rio Grande is not the Columbia River of the Pacific Northwest, but it makes up in history for what it lacks in both dams and water. The articles in this issue help to put the twentieth-century technical considerations into their twenty-first-century policy contexts and thus focus appropriate attention on these critical institutions.