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## **For Immediate Release**

### **American Indian Law Center Hosts New Mexico Water Permitting Training for Tribal Communities**

(Albuquerque, NM) – The American Indian Law Center hosted the first of a 4 part training series on Environmental Justice and environmental permit training on Thursday September 10, 2009. The training was held at the Santa Clara Pueblo’s Big Rock Event Center in Espanola, New Mexico and focused on the New Mexico Water Permitting Process. Mr. Glenn Saums, Acting Bureau Chief for the New Mexico Environment Department Surface Water Quality Bureau, and Ms. Melanie Sanchez, Environmental Scientist for the New Mexico Environment Department Ground Water Quality Bureau presented information on ground and surface water permitting with their respective bureaus.

“In our meetings with tribal leadership and with the New Mexico Environment Department tribal liaison, the need for state environmental permit training was clearly apparent, especially with the multiple tribal, state, county, and municipal jurisdictions involved in environmental issues in New Mexico. The New Mexico Water Permitting Training for Tribal Communities was successful in providing important information to tribal leadership and environmental directors on the state’s ground and surface water permitting processes,” said the Law Center’s Director, Helen B. Padilla.

In addition to water permitting procedures, the training also provided information on Environmental Justice in New Mexico contained in Governor Bill Richardson’s 2005 Environmental Justice Executive Order. The executive order directs nine state agencies to provide meaningful opportunities for involvement in decisions that may affect environmental quality and health; to ensure that information is available in Spanish, English, and in tribal languages of New Mexico’s 22 Indian Pueblos, Nations, and Tribes; and to develop an Environmental Justice Task Force. Further, information on the recently enacted 2009 New Mexico State Tribal Collaboration Act was shared with tribal participants. The Act provides that state agencies create a tribal collaboration and communication policy, provide cultural competency training, host an annual tribal summit, and identify tribal liaisons within each state agency to facilitate tribal-state governmental relations.

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The combination of Governor Richardson's Executive Order on Environmental Justice and the New Mexico's State Tribal Collaboration Act creates even greater opportunities for tribal participation and consultation in the state agencies' environmental decision-making processes.

Santa Clara Pueblo Governor Walter Dasheno and the Tribal Environmental Program provided information on tribal environmental resources and issues. Santa Clara Pueblo Environment Program Director Joseph Chavarria and Water Specialist Michael Chavarria stressed the importance of tribal participation in state environmental decision-making through tribal consultation requests, submitting tribal comments on matters impacting tribal communities, and participation in state training sessions.

"I truly appreciate the American Indian Law Center and the New Mexico Environment Department providing this important information to tribal leaders and our environment programs. With increased development surrounding tribal lands and impacting tribal resources like water, and with increased tribal capacity to protect our environmental and cultural resources, it has become very important that the state and tribal governments understand the different environmental permitting procedures implemented by our governments. By understanding how we protect our resources, we strengthen our government-to-government relationships and work together more effectively and productively to ensure that the water we drink and use for cultural purposes is protected," said Governor Dasheno. "We value the training and technical assistance provided by the AILC to tribes and strongly encourage support and funding for their important work," said Governor Dasheno.

The AILC, in partnership with the New Mexico Environment Department, will host additional environmental permit trainings from October 2009 to February 2010. The trainings are made possible by a grant from the U.S. EPA Environmental Justice Small Grants Program.

Established in 1967, AILC is the oldest existing Indian-managed and Indian-operated legal and public policy organization in the country serving to strengthen, promote, and honor self-sustaining American Indian and Alaska Native communities through education, training, and leadership.

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