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Rio Nuevo talks to private landowners

By Roy Hamric and Andrew Stuart  
Staff writers

A Rio Nuevo, Ltd. director said Monday (Jan. 19) the company has not been in communication with the General Land Office (GLO) recently, and it is "holding off on doing anything firm until we see which way the state lease application may go."

Steve Cole, an officer in the company's Midland office, said Rio has had calls from Big Bend area private landowners about leasing the water rights to their property. The private landowners have property in the area along the Rio Grande in Presidio County and northward, Cole said. The communications involve "less than 12 landowners" but a large area of land.

The GLO previously said that a decision on the Rio Nuevo application to lease state-owned land would not be made before early March, when a 90-day comment period initiated by the GLO will end. The Senate Subcommittee on the Lease of State Water Rights, chaired by State Sen. Frank Madla, has called on the GLO to hold off on any deal until late 2004, when the subcommittee has completed gathering data. The subcommittee will hold its second public meeting in Dell City Feb. 11 at 1:00 p.m. (MST). The meeting will focus on testimony from three state agencies on the potential effects of a water mining deal such as Rio Nuevo's.

A third meeting is to be held in Marfa Feb. 24. While neither a location nor an agenda for the meeting has been fixed, the meeting is likely to be held in the Marfa High School auditorium and to include testimony from Kathleen White, chair of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and Janet Adams, district manager for Brewster, Jeff Davis and Presidio County water districts.