

**CITY OF ELEPHANT BUTTE
RESOLUTION NO. 26-27-111**

**DECLARING A LOCAL DISASTER DUE TO HISTORICALLY LOW WATER
LEVELS AT ELEPHANT BUTTE RESERVOIR**

WHEREAS, the Elephant Butte City Council met upon notice of a duly noticed regular City Council Meeting on August 12, 2026, at 2 P.M. in the Elephant Butte City Administration Building, 103 Water Street, Elephant Butte, New Mexico 87935

WHEREAS, pursuant to NMSA 1978, Section 3-18-1, establishes that a municipality is a body politic and as and corporate are exercised by its City Council: and,

WHEREAS, NMSA 1978, Section 3-18-1 grants cities those powers necessary and proper to preserve the public health, safety, prosperity, comfort, and welfare of their inhabitants; and,

WHEREAS, the All-Hazard Emergency Management Act, NMSA 1978, Sections 12-10-1 through 12-10-10, authorizes local governments to declare local disaster emergencies whenever the occurrence or imminent threat of widespread or severe damage, injury, loss of life, property damage, or economic disruption exceeds local capabilities; and,

WHEREAS, Elephant Butte Reservoir is the largest reservoir in the State of New Mexico and serves as the economic, recreational, environmental, and cultural centerpiece of Elephant Butte and Sierra County, supporting boating, fishing, camping, hunting, tourism, hospitality, retail commerce, marina operations, recreational vehicle parks, guide services, restaurants, lodging establishments, fuel providers, and numerous businesses whose economic viability depends directly or indirectly upon reservoir-based recreation; and,

WHEREAS, Elephant Butte Lake State Park is consistently among New Mexico's most visited state parks, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors annually and generating substantial economic activity, employment opportunities, and gross receipts tax revenues for the City of Elephant Butte; and,

WHEREAS, as of July 30, 2026, Elephant Butte Reservoir has declined to approximately 1.4 percent of conservation storage capacity, containing only approximately 26,732 acre-feet of water, representing one of the lowest reservoir levels observed in decades, having declined from approximately 12.7 percent capacity only three months earlier and 3.9 percent capacity only one month earlier;

WHEREAS, the reservoir continues to decline despite seasonal operational changes and the cessation of irrigation releases, and Elephant Butte reasonably anticipates that, absent immediate coordinated state and federal assistance, continued drought conditions, diminished inflows, and sustained historically low reservoir elevations will result in further deterioration of recreational infrastructure, additional public safety hazards, increased environmental degradation, further losses to tourism-dependent businesses, and long-term economic harm to the residents and Elephant Butte; and,

WHEREAS, the cumulative effects of the historically low reservoir levels constitute not only an environmental and recreational crisis, but also a regional economic disaster affecting employment, business revenues, tax collections, property values, public infrastructure, and the financial stability of Elephant Butte and local governments throughout Sierra County; and,

WHEREAS, the unprecedented decline in reservoir elevations has rendered numerous public boat ramps, marina facilities, docks, beaches, and recreational access points unusable or severely restricted, substantially reducing public access to Elephant Butte Reservoir and limiting recreational opportunities traditionally available to residents and visitors; and,

WHEREAS, rapidly receding waters have exposed decades of accumulated debris, abandoned vehicles, submerged structures, metal, tires, hazardous materials, sediment deposits, and other dangerous conditions that create significant risks to public health and safety and require substantial cleanup efforts before affected areas can safely be reopened to the public; and,

WHEREAS, the declining reservoir has also exposed archaeological resources, historical artifacts, and culturally significant sites requiring evaluation and protection under applicable federal and state laws, thereby increasing the complexity, duration, and expense of cleanup and recovery operations; and,

WHEREAS, continued low reservoir elevations threaten water quality, fisheries, wildlife habitat, shoreline stability, recreational infrastructure, and the long-term viability of Elephant Butte Lake State Park and surrounding public lands; and,

WHEREAS, businesses throughout Elephant Butte that depend upon reservoir recreation, including marinas, hotels, vacation rentals, campgrounds, restaurants, convenience stores, fuel stations, sporting goods retailers, fishing guides, recreational outfitters, repair facilities, and other tourism-related enterprises have experienced or reasonably anticipate significant reductions in revenue, employment, and economic activity; and,

WHEREAS, the resulting decline in visitation threatens the loss of jobs, business closures, reduced investment, decreased property values, and substantial reductions in gross receipts tax revenues relied upon by Elephant Butte to provide essential governmental services; and,

WHEREAS, the extraordinary conditions presently affecting Elephant Butte Reservoir exceed the financial, personnel, and operational capabilities of Elephant Butte acting alone, and additional assistance from the State of New Mexico and the federal government is necessary to protect public health, safety, infrastructure, natural resources, businesses, employment, and the regional economy; and,

WHEREAS, immediate coordinated governmental action is necessary to protect public safety, stabilize the local economy, remove hazardous debris, restore recreational access where feasible, protect cultural and environmental resources, assist affected businesses and workers, and pursue all available disaster relief, emergency management, infrastructure, and economic recovery funding;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that pursuant to the authority granted by the All-Hazard Emergency Management Act, NMSA 1978, Sections 12-10-1 through 12-10-10, the Elephant Butte City Council hereby declares that the historically low water levels at Elephant Butte Reservoir constitute a Local Disaster Emergency affecting the health, safety, welfare, economy, environment, and natural resources of the City of Elephant Butte.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council requests that the Governor of the State of New Mexico recognize this disaster emergency and authorize all available emergency assistance, disaster relief, infrastructure funding, technical assistance, and economic recovery resources available through the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Department of Finance and Administration, Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department, State Parks Division, Economic Development Department, Department of Environment, Department of Transportation, and all other appropriate state agencies.

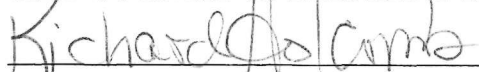
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council requests the Governor seek all available federal assistance, including assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, United States Bureau of Reclamation, United States Army Corps of Engineers, United States Department of Agriculture, United States Economic Development Administration, Small Business Administration, United States Department of the Interior, and any other federal agency administering disaster assistance, economic recovery, infrastructure, environmental restoration, or emergency management programs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City of Elephant Butte specifically requests assistance for:

1. Economic assistance for businesses, employees and governmental entities adversely affected by the decline in reservoir-based tourism;
2. Tourism recovery initiatives, infrastructure improvements, marketing assistance, and economic development projects intended to restore recreational use and visitor activity; and
3. Any additional state or federal assistance necessary to protect the public health, safety, welfare, economy, natural resources, and long-term prosperity of the City of Elephant Butte.

APPROVED, ADOPTED, AND PASSED THIS 12 DAY OF AUGUST 2026.

CITY COUNCIL OF ELEPHANT BUTTE



Richard Holcomb, Mayor



Kim Skinner, Mayor Pro Tem



Cathy Harmon, Councilor



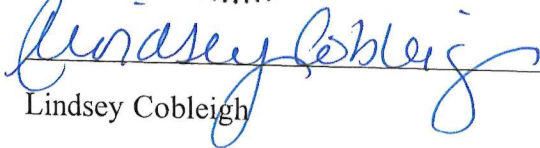
Michael Williams, Councilor



Skylar Arnold, Councilor



Attest:



Lindsey Cobleigh

City Clerk