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LAS CRUCES — State Attorney General Hector Balderas doesn’t want New Mexico communities to be pitted against one another as water resources dwindle and an interstate legal challenge over the Rio Grande looms.

Balderas announced Thursday during a visit to Las Cruces that his office is partnering with the Water Resources Research Institute at New Mexico State University.

The goal is to find more innovative ways to use water and to plan for future demand. “It’s a long-term strategy to better protect families in New Mexico, recognizing that water is vital. It’s a public safety issue as well as an economic development issue,” Balderas said.

New Mexico is enjoying one of its wettest periods in close to a decade thanks to afternoon thunderstorms consistently dumping rain over many parts of the state. On Monday, the rain gauge at the Albuquerque airport recorded 2.24 inches, setting a record for 24-hour rainfall.

While severe drought has all but disappeared from the latest maps, forecasters say New Mexico will need even more rain if it wants to reverse the effects of back-to-back dry years in which the state recorded record-low reservoir levels and river flows.

Under the partnership between the research institute and the attorney general’s office, scientists plan to get a better handle on the water resources available in New Mexico.

The attorney general’s office is investing $1 million from its consumer protection fund in the institute to help with the work.

It’s just as important to fund research as it is litigation, Balderas said.