

## Save the San Pedro

Natalie Danforth, Michael Gregory, Steve Johnson, Jerome J. Pratt.

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Dear Concerned Citizen:

No doubt you have recently read news reports about the water issue facing those of us who live in the Upper San Pedro River Basin. It may have appeared to you from those accounts that the problem was not one of future water supply, but rather one centered on availability of FHA loans.

In the midst of the flurry of activity on the part of local government officials, real estate developers, their attorneys and local boosters of full-speed-ahead development, the Huachuca Audubon Society, Defenders of Wildlife, the Cochise Conservation Council, and the Sierra Club would like you to keep the following facts in mind.

- 1. Today, as you read this, groundwater in the Upper San Pedro River Basin is being pumped out of the ground faster than it is being replaced.** Although pumpage figures for 1983 will not be available for another few months, pumpage between the years 1980 through 1982 averaged about 71,000 acre-feet per year. The average annual recharge in the Basin is estimated to be 20,000 acre-feet per year. According to those figures, we are overdrafting 51,000 acre-feet per year from the Basin. As demands for water increase we must remind ourselves that we are discussing a finite resource. We are talking about the mining of groundwater.
- 2. The San Pedro River depends directly on the Basin's groundwater, and the overdraft is already affecting the flow of the river.** If allowed to continue at the present rate of withdrawal, the overdraft can be expected to dry up the river's perennial flow in the foreseeable future.
- 3. The San Pedro River has been identified by the scientific community as one of the richest wildlife habitats on the North American continent.** The State Game and Fish Department reports that about 150 species of breeding or migrant birds nest or rest along the river in an average year. The river and the area surrounding it support the widest diversity of animals in the country and the second widest in the world.
- 4. Under master development plans tentatively approved by Cochise County and Sierra Vista officials, thousands of acres of land around Sierra Vista and Ft. Huachuca would be subdivided.** Just two of the those subdivisions, the Tenneco and Summit projects, if completed would more than double the human population of the Sierra Vista area from 30,000 to 60,000 with a corresponding increase in water consumption for domestic use. With pressure from Sierra Vista officials to increase immigration to the area as exemplified in their proposal to award \$137,000 to the Chamber of Commerce to promote local growth, it is logical to assume that without an integrated management approach to water use, the drawdown of the Basin is likely to at least continue at the present rate, if not accelerate.

**5. Incredible as it may sound, at present there is no legal requirement that a developer prove there is an adequate water supply in our area before selling lots.** The developer is required to provide a report on water adequacy to the Department of Water Resources prior to recordation of plans. If the DWR reports to the Real Estate Commissioner that there is not an adequate water supply to support the development, the Real Estate Commissioner then includes the DWR report in the “Public Report for Subdivisions,” and the prospective buyer is thereby warned that there is inadequate water to support the subdivision for a 100-year period. Thus we find a critical loophole in the law that allows “business as usual” to be practiced in a setting of “let the buyer beware.”

**6. Even if the Basin’s water supply was declared legally adequate, developments could still pump the river dry,** for another provision in the law defines “adequate” in terms of “normal” Arizona practices, i.e., groundwater mining. Adequacy under the law does not mean water equilibrium, but merely the estimated ability of the water table to be dropped up to ten feet per year for 100 years.

**7. One option available to help negate those legal provisions and protect the San Pedro river would be to have the Director of the DWR declare the Upper San Pedro Basin an Active Management Area (AMA).** Assuming the goal of the AMA in the Basin would be to achieve water equilibrium in a reasonable period of time, developers in the area would be denied the go-ahead to develop unless water adequacy could be assured. Citizens of the Basin would have the opportunity to help set criteria on how we wanted the groundwater used in accomplishing the goal of water equilibrium, sometimes referred to as “safe yield.” (Safe yield is reached when groundwater withdrawals do not exceed recharge, thereby eliminating overdraft.) What that would mean is the beginning of the end of irresponsible groundwater mining and the resulting diversion of water away from the river; it would mean the conservation and recycling of water and a mutual stewardship of water by industry, agriculture, developers, water providers and domestic users.

If you find some of what you have just read hard to believe, please request more information from Beverly Beddow of the Department of Water Resources. If you wonder how county and city officials are preparing to deal with our water future, write or call them. If you agree that the Upper San Pedro River Basin should be protected, write Governor Babbitt and Mr. Steiner. Ask them to see that the necessary steps are taken to protect the San Pedro River with AMA designation for the basin.