

# WATERSHED MONITORING PROJECT UPDATE

SILVER CITY WATERSHED KEEPERS CHECKING UP ON SAN VICENTE CREEK

by Regina Willis, AmeriCorps VISTA Staffer

Volunteers gathered one recent chilly November morning at Big Ditch Park, eager to donate their time to protect our local watershed and become part of a new group called Silver City Watershed Keepers. Members spent the morning being trained to take water quality measurements of San Vicente Creek, which flows through downtown. Information they collect will document trends in the creek's water chemistry and screen for any potential problems. They were led by GRIP's AmeriCorps VISTA staffer Regina Willis and Dave Menzie, of the New Mexico Environment Department's Surface Water Quality Bureau.

When asked, volunteers said they were drawn to this work for varying reasons; some to learn more about our natural areas, others as a way to raise greater awareness about local resources. Silver City Watershed Keeper, Michele Giese, said she became part of the monitoring initiative in order "to bring our community's attention to the old mine tailings along the San Vicente south of town as well as to other historic mining sites in the area that might be contaminating our local streams. The creek is a beautiful resource in our community and protecting it needs to be a priority."

Most of the waterways in the Silver City watershed are dry a good part of



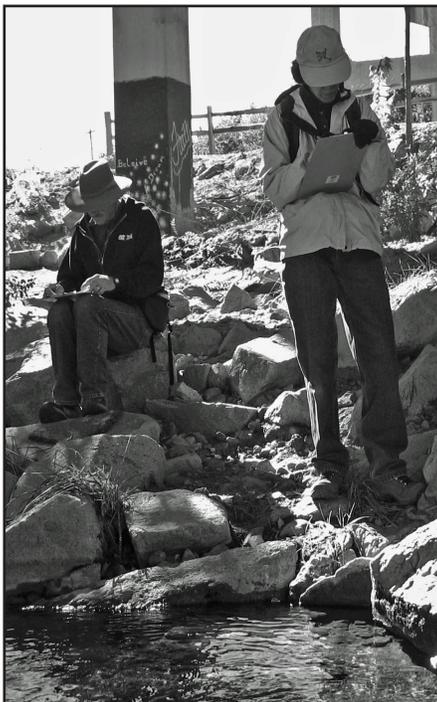
SAN VICENTE CREEK IS ONE OF FEW AREA WATERWAYS FLOWING YEAR-ROUND. (REGINA WILLIS PHOTO.)

the year, but this creek is a rare exception. Starting at the confluence of Silva and Pinos Altos Creeks, just north of Big Ditch Park, the San Vicente flows parallel to Bullard Street and holds water year-round, making it a convenient stream to monitor. But running through downtown also makes it highly susceptible to non-point-source pollution, making it an important stream to monitor water quality.

Menzie trained each of the ten eager volunteers to use proper equipment and to take meaningful notes on their observations at each of the monitoring sites. Nationwide, volunteer groups like Silver City Watershed Keepers provide important information for their communities. The top three uses of such collected data are for problem identification, local decision-making, and education. Menzie explained that his office is able to monitor each of its own monitoring sites only once every seven years. From now on, Silver City Watershed Keepers data will help fill the gaps between state-initiated monitoring events, allowing Menzie and his colleagues to have a more informed picture of local water chemistry values over time.

The monitoring has local volunteers not only taking a closer look at water chemistry, but also observing the natural area as a whole. They're discovering that San Vicente is a great place to spot birds and other wildlife. On the way to the second monitoring location, for example, a couple of volunteers stopped and marveled at small fish swimming in the shallow water of the creek. Soon others joined in, each appreciating a rare experience in our high-desert environment.

Silver City Watershed Keepers are eager for more volunteers. To participate or learn more, contact Regina Willis at GRIP: 538-8078 or e-mail [regina@gilaresources.info](mailto:regina@gilaresources.info).



WATERSHED KEEPERS AT WORK ALONG SAN VICENTE CREEK. (REGINA WILLIS PHOTO.)

## NM HEADWATERS RECEIVE ONRW PROTECTION FROM EIB

The New Mexico Environmental Improvement Board has voted 7 to 3 to approve a rule requiring the state, under the Outstanding National Resource Waters designation, to protect its headwater streams in federally-designated wilderness areas. Effective December 30 this action protects approximately 700 miles of 195 perennial rivers and streams, 29 lakes, and nearly 5,000 acres of 1,405 wetlands in 12 Wilderness areas (including the Gila and Aldo Leopold). Safeguarding these headwaters will help maintain a clean water supply for uses within Wilderness areas and downstream by municipalities, agriculture, and recreational interests, while maintaining healthy ecosystems, preserving habitat, and protecting vulnerable and endangered species.

Our thanks to local retired USGS hydrologist Rebecca Summer for testifying before the EIB on behalf of the Gila Conservation Coalition. Summer testified that ONRW designation was important for preventing degradation of the Gila River's headwaters that "are critical to the river's perennial flows from the canyon reaches of the forest and wilderness areas, through the Cliff-Gila Valley to the New Mexico-Arizona border and beyond, supporting agriculture and mining use and providing the life-blood to the last, complete native fish community in the Lower Colorado River Basin, one of the last examples of a healthy southwestern cottonwood-sycamore bosque, and wildlife habitat for game animals and a variety of threatened and endangered species." (For more information, go to [www.nmenv.state.nm.us/swqb/ONRW/](http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/swqb/ONRW/))

## PLEASE RENEW YOUR GRIP MEMBERSHIP

If you're already a member, you'll get a renewal notice by mail. If not, we invite you to join—and help us continue our efforts to reduce the carbon footprint of our communities, to protect the Gila River and its watershed, and to safeguard our regional water supply. With your help we can continue to improve our lives, and those of our children and grandchildren to come. You can always make a secure, tax-deductible donation at [www.gilaresources.info](http://www.gilaresources.info).