

measures represent a cost-effective way to reduce the demand for water, extend the life of our water resources and therefore reduce the need to develop costly new water supplies," stated GCC executive director, Allyson Siwik. "We are disappointed that the full amount of funding recommended by the Evaluation Panel—\$500,000—was cut to \$100,000 by ISC staff. This represents a significant under-investment in evaluation of water savings through conservation."

The Grant County Regional Water Supply project (separate from the above) along with the Bayard Effluent Reuse project and Grant County Infrastructure and Reservoir proposal will be considered together to investigate how they "might be combined or refined to best utilize the treated effluent of those communities at the least cost," according to the ISC staff memo. The "supply project is a high priority for water users in Silver City and the Mining District, and should be a top priority for the AWSA planning process, since the project meets a real water need now by providing a long-term, sustainable water supply to 26,000 people including Mining District communities with an extremely urgent water need, such as Hurley that has no water rights," stated Siwik during her February testimony.

The ISC also approved investigation of "how the Gila Basin Irrigation Commission Diversion and Storage, Deming Diversion, and Hidalgo County Diversion and Storage proposals might be combined or refined to realize the greatest synergies and best meet agricultural, municipal, and environmental needs."

"A costly, unnecessary diversion, dam and pipeline would forever change the Gila River's unique ecology, compromising the economic, environmental and recreational benefits the Gila provides and put a financial burden on local water users for decades to come," explained GCC Chairman Dutch Salmon. "Not only has there been no demonstrated need for Gila River water, but we can't afford the \$325-million price tag to build a diversion project. Even after using the AWSA subsidy of up to \$128 million, water users must still come up with \$200 million to pay the remainder of the construction costs, an annual exchange cost of at least \$2 million/year and annual operation and maintenance costs of \$5-to-6-million. We question if anyone in southwest New Mexico can pay for this expensive water."

The ISC also approved assessment of the Luna, Pleasanton, and Sunset and New Model ditch improvement proposals. Along with drip irrigation approved for study at the September 2011 ISC meeting, agricultural conservation has the potential to significantly im-

## **ACTION ALERT: TELL INTERSTATE STREAM COMMISSION YOU SUPPORT REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY PROJECT**

*ON FEBRUARY 29, THE ISC APPROVED PROJECTS FOR FURTHER STUDY UNDER THE ARIZONA WATER SETTLEMENTS ACT. THE GRANT COUNTY WATER COMMISSION REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY PROJECT SCORED 14TH ON THE LIST OF 20 PROJECTS RANKED BY THE ISC EVALUATION PANEL. THIS IS A TRAGEDY GIVEN THE FACT THAT THIS PROJECT MEETS THE FUTURE WATER NEEDS OF 26,000 PEOPLE IN OUR AREA FOR A FRACTION OF THE COST (\$15 MILLION VS. \$325 MILLION) OF A LARGE-SCALE DIVERSION PROJECT (THREE OF WHICH SCORED #2, #3 AND #4 ON THE LIST). THE GRANT COUNTY REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY PROJECT WOULD DEVELOP 750 ACRE-FEET OF WATER PER YEAR AT THE GRANT COUNTY AIRPORT AND MAKE THAT WATER AVAILABLE TO MINING DISTRICT COMMUNITIES THAT LACK A SECURE WATER SUPPLY. THE PROJECT WILL ALSO CONSERVE 750 ACRE-FEET OF WATER THROUGH REUSE AT THE SILVER CITY WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT. NOT ONLY WILL THE PROJECT SAVE MONEY, THE REGIONAL PIPELINE WILL CONNECT SILVER CITY TO THE MINING DISTRICT AND ALLOW FOR MORE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF GROUNDWATER RESOURCES ACROSS THE AREA. E-MAIL THE ISC TODAY AND TELL THEM THAT YOU SUPPORT THE GRANT COUNTY WATER COMMISSION REGIONAL WATER SUPPLY PROJECT BECAUSE IT MEETS THE DRINKING WATER NEEDS NOW OF 26,000 PEOPLE IN SILVER CITY AND THE MINING DISTRICT:*

Jim Dunlap, Chairman <waterjim1@live.com>; Scott A. Verhines <scott.verhines@state.nm.us>; Estevan R. López <estevan.lopez@state.nm.us>; Randal Crowder <rscrowder@suddenlink.net>; Mark Sanchez <msanchez@abcwua.org>; Blane Sanchez <indnh2o@aol.com>, James Wilcox <jrwilcox@pvtn.net>; Buford Harris <bufordharris@yahoo.com>; Phelps Anderson <phelpsanderson@dfn.com>; Topper Thorpe <topperthorpe@gmail.com>

prove irrigation efficiency and reduce water demand from the agricultural sector, the largest water user in the four-county area.

The ISC also approved working with independent professional experts to assess how best to integrate and refine the various watershed proposals to realize the greatest synergies and benefits, as well as further assessment of the Deming Effluent Reuse proposal.

Over 15 people provided public comment on the ISC decision to a packed conference room, including Mitch Hellman, a Silver City businessman who co-owns Alotta Gelato. Hellman presented a letter to commissioners on behalf of 120 businesses in southwest New Mexico and the Southwest New Mexico Green Chamber of Commerce, urging the commissioners to approve responsible, cost-effective, non-diversion alternatives for evaluation as they feel the Gila River is critical to the tourist economy of the region.

Lois Fuller, a Catron County resident, told the group that the Gila National Forest and the Gila and San Francisco rivers are "the heart of the whole area. Our economy will suffer if a diversion project goes through. Economic benefit to our local communities is on the line."

Donna Stevens, director of the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance and a partner in the Gila Conservation Coalition, said GCC's Rosgen diversion proposal "represents a win-win solution for Cliff-Gila Valley irrigators and the Gila River. Redesigning irrigation ditch diversions following a Rosgen-style cross-vane design allows for maintenance of instream flow while also meeting the water needs of irrigators." The concept will be analyzed as part of the Gila Basin Irrigation Commission's proposal.

Siwik encouraged ISC commissioners to consider that there is enough AWSA funding available as part of the \$66-million to fund all of the non-diversion alternatives currently on the Tier 2 list, benefiting farmers, ranchers, municipalities, industry and the environment throughout southwest New Mexico. "The non-diversion projects," she said, "provide real solutions for southwest New Mexico's long-term water needs at a fraction of the cost of a large-scale diversion project and most received strong support at the recent multi-stakeholder New Mexico First Town Hall meeting."

The ISC staff is beginning to develop plans for carrying out further study on these projects and will hold a meeting with stakeholders on April 12 to get input on questions that should be addressed through additional assessment. A new website has been developed to serve as a clearinghouse for all information developed under the AWSA process. Although still very incomplete, visit [www.nmawsa.org](http://www.nmawsa.org) to download studies, project scores and rankings, and other updates on the AWSA planning process.