

ARIZONA SETTLEMENTS ACT UPDATE

ISC ATTORNEY CLARIFIES AWSA PROJECT FUNDING

by Allyson Siwik, Executive Director

The AWSA Stakeholders Group and Implementation/Technical Committee continue to meet regularly to discuss projects for evaluation under the Arizona Water Settlements Act (AWSA). Stakeholders in southwestern New Mexico are trying to determine how to use funding from this Congressional water bill to cost-effectively balance water supply and demand while protecting the Gila River. Southwestern New Mexico can use \$66 million to meet local water needs or use up to \$128 million in a federal subsidy to divert up to 14,000 acre-feet per year from the Gila River and its tributary, the San Francisco. After several monthly meetings at which Deputy Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) Director Craig Roepke cast doubt on the use of AWSA funding for non-diversion alternatives, ISC attorney Tracy Hartzler-Toon clarified at the April meeting that \$66 million in AWSA funding can be used for any water supply demand as defined by the Stakeholders Group.

This was welcome news to the Gila Conservation Coalition and most other stakeholders who support cost-effective alternatives to meet our future water needs, including municipal and agricultural conservation, watershed restoration, and sustainable use of groundwater supplies. In



GILA RIVER AT FLOOD STAGE.

"No American should go through life without knowing a river, some river, and the wilder the better."

—writer Wallace Stegner

addition to the fact that no need for Gila River water has been demonstrated, implementation of proven conservation and water efficiency measures can sharply reduce the amount of water needed in the future at a fraction of the cost of a Gila River diversion project. GCC believes conservation and sustainable use of groundwater can secure our water future without building a costly diversion project that will alter this river forever. The Gila Conservation Coalition will continue to promote common-sense alternatives that protect the Gila for our future and save taxpayers' money.

AMEC, hired to conduct water planning studies for the ISC, presented the results of its water demand work for southwestern New Mexico at the June meeting. The consultancy reaffirmed that the region has enough water to meet its future water needs over the next 40 years without diverting Gila River water. The firm projected relatively slow growth for all counties and urban centers in the four-county region, with the exception of a projected faster rate of growth for Deming. Only about five percent of water use in the area is projected for the municipal/domestic sector, with the bulk of consumptive use by the agriculture and mining sectors. The consulting firm also presented data that demonstrated the significant potential for conservation to reduce municipal demand and thus extending the life of public water supplies. This conclusion supports the soundness of GCC's proposal to use AWSA funding to implement water conservation as a means to create "new" supply.

These demand results will be used in combination with a water supply assessment completed last year to evaluate the region's future water needs. It is expected that the Bureau of Reclamation will conduct this water needs assessment along with identification and evaluation of alternatives to meet future water needs.

The next meeting of the AWSA Stakeholders Group is scheduled for 11am, July 15, at the Grant County Administration Building in Silver City.

GILA RIVER FESTIVAL CELEBRATES WEB OF LIFE

The Gila River represents the lifeblood of a biologically rich and complex landscape to which humans are intricately tied. Several thousand plant and animal species call the Gila and its headwaters home, making the mountains of southwestern New Mexico one of only two recognized "biodiversity hot spots" in North America. Indeed, many species found in the region occur nowhere else. Co-sponsored by GRIP, the 6th annual Gila River Festival celebrates this extraordinary web of life, highlighting the critical importance of the state's last free-flowing river in sustaining an ecologically diverse and connected landscape.

Participants will see, touch and feel what biodiversity is all about, and why it matters to our welfare. The celebration kicks off with a keynote speech by writer-activist-teacher Mary Sojourner, discussing the importance of biodiversity and conservation of our wildest places. Mary will also convene a three-hour Writing From River circle. In addition to Sojourner's talks, the River Lecture Series hosts several renowned researchers and conservationists for talks on wild-life, native plants, and imperiled species. Expert-guided field trip, kayaking, and workshop opportunities will also extend the opportunity to experience directly the area's biological range and variety. Evening hikes are new this year.



MARY SOJOURNER

In historic downtown Silver City, attendees will enjoy museum and gallery tours featuring art and photography inspired by or related to the Gila River region. On Saturday, the festival teams with the Red Hot Children's Fiesta to provide hands-on activities that give kids a chance to explore the wonders of nature right downtown. On Saturday evening, the Wild and Scenic Environmental Film Festival shows for the first time locally at our historic Silco Theatre. On Sunday, events finish with a panel discussion on the economic benefits of maintaining an intact, biologically diverse Gila River.

This year's festival promises to instill a sense of connectedness to our precious river, as well as promote an understanding of the human role in sustaining its remarkable — yet fragile — ecology. Information: www.gilaconservation.org or call 575-538-8078 or 590-5698.