



Gila Resources Information Project

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Mission Statement

Recognizing that human and environmental systems are inseparable and interdependent, Gila Resources Information Project pursues two goals: to protect and nurture human communities by safeguarding the natural resources that sustain us all; and to safeguard natural resources by facilitating informed public participation in resource use decisions.

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To become a member and receive a copy of *Get A GRIP*, a minimum annual donation of \$20.00 is appreciated. (\$10 for students and low-income residents.) GRIP is a 501(c)(3), tax-exempt organization; your contribution is tax-deductible.

Other Sites:
www.vivaverdenm.com
www.gilaconservation.org



RANGE OF ARIZONA WATER SETTLEMENT PROJECTS NARROWS AS DEADLINE APPROACHES

DEMING PROPOSAL FOR GILA RIVER DIVERSION ONE OF 21 TO ADVANCE

by Allyson Siwik, Executive Director

The New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) has narrowed from approximately 45 to 21 the field of projects to be considered under the Arizona Water Settlements Act (AWSA). Approved at its September meeting, these proposals include projects for municipal conservation, municipal water infrastructure improvements, agricultural irrigation improvements, watershed restoration, and a diversion project.

Put forth by the City of Deming and outlined in very general terms, the Gila River Regional Water Diversion and Pipeline Project envisions building a diversion near the village of Gila with a 42,000 acre-foot impoundment (or "storage for three 14,000 acre-foot events"). An exact location is not identified. The project application discusses a partnership with Silver City and the Mining District despite the fact that these communities have their own proposals that don't include a diversion. Under the Deming plan water would be piped along Highways 211 and 180, using booster pumps over the Continental Divide. It would be conveyed ultimately to Silver City's regional water system and Deming's Peru Mill Industrial Park, where it would be stored in tanks as well as used to recharge the aquifer. This Tier 1 proposal carried an initial price-tag of \$250-million, with costs to be further refined in the upcoming Tier 2 filing.

Approved projects advancing to the Tier 2 phase require more detailed information, such as amounts of water developed, technical viability, estimated costs, project supporters, and economic impact. In February 2012 the ISC will select a handful of projects from Tier 2 submissions for further technical, economic, and environmental assessment, with a decision in early 2014 on which project(s) will be implemented under the AWSA. New Mexico must notify the U.S. Secretary of Interior by the end of 2014 whether or not the state will use Gila River water.

In addition to the Tier 1 projects approved, the ISC also directed staff to study a number of projects outside of the Tier 2 evaluation process. The Gila Conservation Coalition, of which GRIP is a partner, was successful in persuading the ISC to approve for further study agricultural conservation, wetlands restoration, and a "water bank" for outdoor watering in the Gila Basin.

GCC put forth a proposal to increase agricultural conservation to reduce water use and provide a net benefit to our groundwater reserves in the Mimbres Basin. The ISC commissioners agreed that agricultural conservation warrants further study as well as an examination of decreased depletions already achieved from drip irrigation and the potential to realize additional progress in the Mimbres Basin. Inappropriate extrapolation of research results along with outdated data are being used to discredit the benefits of drip irrigation. Combined with reduced water use from mining, agricultural conservation has likely reduced the groundwater deficit reported in 2005 that relied on 2000 data.

The commission also approved the wetlands restoration proposal for further study. Wetlands restoration would allow for naturally-created or built wetlands on land adjacent to the Gila corridor and also would reconnect the river to the floodplain and accommodate large flood flows. Wetlands would allow for the river's proper functioning condition, thereby improving groundwater infiltration and storage, slowing flood velocity, and reducing bank erosion. Providing increased groundwater recharge and flood protection will benefit irrigators and native flora and fauna that are adversely affected during times when the Gila River dries up.

The Gila-San Francisco Basin is the only watershed in the state that prohibits domestic outdoor water use. This prohibition is the result of the Rifkind Decree adjudication of the basin in the *Arizona v. California* case. The Commission also approved further study of the legal and technical aspects of using existing unused water rights or AWSA water to set up a system for modest use of domestic outdoor watering.

We thank all who sent the ISC their comments and concerns in response to last spring's action alert. Your efforts really made a difference in keeping the door open to consideration of cost-effective conservation and restoration measures. GRIP and its partners in GCC will continue to call attention to the lack of need for river water and the high price of a diversion project. Common sense tells us that cost-effective alternatives can meet our future demand for water while also keeping the Gila flowing freely.