

The Verde River

Submitted by Tina Bickel

The Verde River is one of the last semi-arid perennial rivers in the United States. According to U.S. Geological Survey reports, the first 24 miles, also referred to as the upper Verde River, rely on springs originating from the Big Chino aquifer for at least 80% of its base flow. Without baseflow, a stream is a dry wash, flowing only during storm runoff. Hydrologists predict that pumping water from the aquifer will eventually result in a near equal reduction of flow in the Verde River.

The upper Verde River provides some of the best habitat for native fish recovery and is home to populations of other key species in an ecologically diverse habitat. The spring flow is crucial to downstream riparian habitat required by Arizona's bald eagle, western yellow-billed cuckoo, southwestern willow flycatcher, and other important and sensitive, birds, amphibians, and reptiles.

The degradation and/or loss of riparian habitat causes serious negative and irreversible consequences for the wildlife and plant species dependent on those habitats and precludes governmental agencies and the public from obtaining cultural, social, economic, and recreational benefits. Specifically, reduction in the baseflow in the upper Verde threatens the health of many native fish and wildlife species, diminishes the recreational opportunities on the river, and reduces the availability of clean water to downstream communities and farms in the Verde Valley and in the Phoenix metropolitan area.

Position

We, the undersigned, believe that as currently proposed, the Prescott, Prescott Valley and Chino Valley water importation projects, as well as planned and potential large scale development projects in the Big Chino Valley will greatly reduce the flow in the upper Verde River. These projects will reduce flow by intercepting Big Chino groundwater that currently flows to the river. The reduction in flow will adversely impact the abundant wildlife and plants that inhabit the region and the people that enjoy the river.

Protecting Arizona's scarce renewable water resources is critical to our existence and the economic viability of our future. Responsible regional planning on a local level is essential to set the proper course.

The three communities and large-scale developers must implement comprehensive plans to prevent adverse impacts to the river caused by their projects and without making the Verde an effluent dependent river. These plans must be completed prior to commencing construction of pumping or pipeline infrastructure. We strongly recommend that these communities and developers work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to prepare Habitat Conservation Plans or other mitigation plans that would prevent adverse impacts.

Further, the communities and county must develop aggressive water conservation and regional water management activities in order to avoid further depleting the aquifers that supply the headwaters of the Verde River.

Working together, we can keep the Verde River flowing.

The Sonoran Audubon Society has signed on to the position statement as shown above.

