



# ARIZONA RIPARIAN COUNCIL

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## **COMMENTS: GOVERNOR'S WATER LISTENING SESSION**

Arizona Riparian Council Written Comments  
Tucson Session, December 14, 2004

The Arizona Riparian Council (ARC) was formed in 1986 as a result of an increasing concern over the alarming rate of loss of Arizona's riparian areas. The purpose of the Arizona Riparian Council is to facilitate the exchange of information on the status, protection, and management of riparian systems in Arizona. We are a volunteer-run organization, with open membership to any interested individual or organization. Our membership consists largely of professionals from government agencies and organizations, scientific consultants, academicians and members of interest groups oriented to the outdoors and nature. The ARC wants to thank Governor Napolitano and Director Guenther for their personal attention to this issue and for this opportunity to speak to them directly.

Reduced water availability for wildlife and wildlife habitat is occurring both as a consequence of drought and as a consequence of increasing water use by humans. Although healthy ecosystems have inherent resilience to drought, tolerance thresholds can be crossed when drought is combined with the impacts from human diversions of water. This may cause serious decline and loss of aquatic and riparian ecosystems. These riparian ecosystems are perhaps the most sensitive of all habitats in Arizona to reductions in water availability.

At the ARC, we are concerned by the lack of mandate in Arizona water law to consider the impact of water use on the condition and continued existence of Arizona's rivers, streams, springs and associated riparian habitats. These habitats are considered Arizona's rarest natural communities, harboring a disproportionately large number of wildlife relative to their size.

Additionally, "Living Rivers" touch the soul and contribute to the beauty and quality of life we value in Arizona.

Flowing rivers and natural riparian areas have been eliminated in large urban centers such as along the dry river courses in Tucson and Phoenix. Many dollars are currently being expended to re-establish such habitats in places such as the Rio Salado project area. In other areas, where riparian ecosystems still survive, these habitats are facing extirpation due to spiraling growth coupled with the lack of legal mandates to consider the water needs of aquatic and riparian ecosystems. The plights of the San Pedro, the

Cienega de Santa Clara (see attached letter) and Upper Verde Rivers are prime examples. Unless action is taken to reverse these trends, the inevitable result will be more dry dusty streambeds where water once flowed and trees once grew.

In these areas where growth is confronting remaining riparian habitats, specific decisions allocating water for aquatic and riparian functions should be taken. Every remaining mile of “living stream” is precious. Ecosystem functions include things like nutrient cycling, and sediment transport, not just evapotranspiration of the plant community itself.

We commend your initiative in creating the Arizona Drought Task Force and tasking them with development of the Arizona Drought Preparedness Plan. We support many of the recommended mitigation goals of the Environmental Health, Watershed Management, Livestock, and Wildlife Workgroup (dated 8/34/04, in Operational Drought Plan, Appendix I, mitigation goals). We believe, however, that more is needed to adequately protect Arizona's riparian areas, during both normal and drought times.

Arizona should act now to reshape its long-term water resource policy with the intent of protecting riparian ecosystem needs, both in the Drought Plan and through other mechanisms. To this end, we offer the following suggestions to Governor Napolitano:

1. Direct ADWR and its contractors and regulated entities to identify the water needs of riparian and aquatic ecosystems in local and basin-wide water budgets. Water needed by riparian and aquatic ecosystems includes base flows, flood flows, and maintenance of groundwater levels. Outflow to the next downstream basin should also be considered.
2. Work toward spatial and sub-basin water management, inside and outside AMAs. This would involve ADWR working with local groups to develop sub-basin water budgets. And it would involve fostering the establishment of locally-administered authorities to protect surface water flows and riparian ecosystem needs. We recognize the Santa Cruz AMA as a good start.
3. Support funding to implement monitoring of ecosystem parameters, such as depth to water and daily flows along key rivers.
4. Support regulating pumping near ecologically significant springs, streams, and shallow groundwater zones, inside and outside AMAs.
4. Allocate most of the \$100 million from sales of interstate water for acquisition of water rights and appurtenant lands from willing sellers. These funds should be used to protect and restore riparian ecosystems through retiring surface water diversions and agricultural groundwater pumping along streams and springs. Dedicated acquisition funding would go a long way towards securing a future for Arizona's streams and springs in the present market economy.

5. Direct the Arizona Department of Water Resources and the Arizona Game and Fish Department to map locations where reduced water availability due to current or projected water use is causing harm or has the potential to cause harm to riparian habitat and its wildlife. This should be included in the Drought Plan. The Governor's 2003 executive order specifically directed the task force to "identify locations in the state where reduced water availability is impacting wildlife and wildlife habitat." Such areas have not been delineated in the draft report. We do have to acknowledge that this data is not uniformly available at present, but we hope this can be corrected.
6. Carefully craft meaningful and enforceable water conservation standards that are tailored to basin and watershed conditions and that protect surface water ecosystems that are dependent upon groundwater discharge.
7. Direct an economic evaluation of the financial value to state and local economies contributed by surviving riparian ecosystems. For instance, the Governor mentioned the estimated \$28m in annual value contributed by the Upper San Pedro in her opening speech at the Arizona Town Hall a couple of weeks ago. The value of non-extractive ecosystem services such as flood control, water supply, water quality mitigation, and groundwater recharge should also be included in the economic evaluation.
8. Extend the Assured Water Supply program to developing zones outside the Active Management Areas. The extended program should use modern hydrology to look at cumulative impacts from all water users in the groundwater basin and determine sustainable water use and ensure the maintenance of aquatic and riparian ecosystems.
9. Implement incentives and/or regulations that new groundwater users offset or mitigate their impact on the environment, such as through purchase and retirement of agricultural lands.
10. Implement an extraction surcharge on water pumped from any well within a relevant distance of any river, creek, or wetland to provide incentives for conservation.

To achieve these goals, the Arizona Riparian Council would like to offer our assistance, as we are able, to the Governor and the Director. Thank you again for this opportunity to discuss these issues with you.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Board of Directors,

Julia Fonseca, Chair, Water Policy Committee

Attachment