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August 5, 2016

Thomas Buschatzke, Chair, and Members
Governor's Water Augmentation Council
Arizona Department of Water Resources
3550 North Central Avenue, Second Floor
Phoenix, Arizona 85012-2105

Dear Director Buschatzke and Members of the Governor's Water Augmentation Council:

Because the 1980 Groundwater Management Act (AGMA) was developed without an environmental focus, Sierra Club is actively observing the Governor's Water Augmentation Council (GWAC) meetings with great interest.

Generally, we support reexamining Arizona water law, especially the planned initiative to reach out and listen to rural Arizona. If the GWAC is to be successful, all stakeholders must have an opportunity to be heard.

However, we are dismayed that environmental water issues are not mentioned in ADWR's Track One or Track Two plans, have not appeared on Council agendas, and are not acknowledged in the GWAC first annual report. Further, environmental water is not mentioned in ARS Chapter 45 or in AAC R12-15.

Arizona's continuing blindness to environmental water issues is now causing great harm to our future economy, our lifestyle, and our environment and wildlife. Since Arizona's statehood, pumpage and diversions have severely impacted major groundwater basins and seriously degraded five of Arizona's major perennial rivers: the Colorado, Gila, Salt, Santa Cruz, and much of the San Pedro. Additionally, future perennial flow in the upper Verde River and San Pedro River is deeply threatened. Researchers¹ predict that in 2050 groundwater demand in seven river basins will exceed base flow, thus endangering the Agua Fria, Babocomari, San Pedro, upper Verde, and Little Colorado Rivers. One indicator of the declining health of Arizona's rivers and streams is the status of native fish populations. Nineteen of Arizona's original thirty-three native fish species now have status under the Endangered Species Act, and three are extinct. Reduced river flows and deterioration of riparian habitats have detrimental effects on hunting, fishing, boating, birding, and other water-based recreational activities that significantly contribute to Arizona tourism – a growing \$20.9 billion industry bringing revenue from outside Arizona.

¹ Marshall RM, Robles MD, Majka DR, Haney JA (2010) Sustainable Water Management in the Southwestern United States: Reality or Rhetoric? PLoS ONE 5(7): e11687.
[doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0011687](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0011687)



These problems appear throughout 87 percent of Arizona - the rural areas outside the AMAs – where excessive and poorly regulated groundwater pumping threatens the Verde and San Pedro rivers, the springs at Montezuma Well, and other significant rivers and springs in all of the twenty-two planning areas identified in the 2014 ADWR report “A Strategic Vision For Water Supply Sustainability.

Therefore, the Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club requests that the GWAC convene a substantial listening session or conference dedicated to identifying the threats to Arizona’s environmental water resources, and to considering potential solutions. This listening session would permit environmental representatives from many planning areas to seek common solutions to shared problems.

Thirty-six years after the AGMA, consideration of environmental water issues is long overdue. An environmental water conference is a good first step to address a significant omission in Arizona water law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sandy Bahr". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sandy Bahr
Chapter Director
Sierra Club – Grand Canyon Chapter