

## **Sierra Vista Sub-Watershed Pilot District Concept Groundwater Replenishment and Augmentation District**

### **Purpose and Need**

The Upper San Pedro Partnership, of which Fort Huachuca is a member, is required by federal statute (H.R. 1588, Section 321 (2004)) to develop a water management plan to establish a collaborative water use management program in the Sierra Vista subwatershed, Arizona, to achieve the sustainable yield of the regional aquifer, so as to protect the Upper San Pedro River, Arizona, and the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area, Arizona.

The management program must include measurable annual goals for the reduction of the overdrafts of the groundwater of the regional aquifer, to identify specific water use management and conservation measures to facilitate the achievement of such goals, and to identify impediments in current Federal, State, and local laws that hinder efforts on the part of the Partnership to mitigate water usage in order to restore and maintain the sustainable yield of the regional aquifer by and after September 30, 2011.

Fort Huachuca is a critical economic contributor to the local economy. Additionally, the installation contributes over one billion dollars to the state's economy outside of Cochise County. The Fort will be significantly reduced in size, or closed altogether, if the aquifer is not brought into sustainable yield by 2011. The ability to affect the outcome has been left to state and local agencies until that time. If sustainable yield is not achieved by 2011, the Department of Defense (DOD) will remove local agencies from the decision process.

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Significant work by the Upper San Pedro Partnership over the past eight years has identified a management program, to include augmentation options, which would achieve sustainable yield by 2011. However, two major impediments currently preclude local entities from initiating a management program to accomplish the goal: funding and authority.

If these impediments are not addressed legislatively, environmental impacts on endangered species caused by continuing groundwater overdraft in the Upper San Pedro sub watershed will continue unabated forcing the DOD to step in and mitigate the impacts. DOD mitigation will critically and significantly reduce the direct and indirect impacts of Fort Huachuca on the area; Fort Huachuca will cease to be economically significant.

The purpose of the management program and federal collaboration is to address potential environmental impacts on endangered species caused by groundwater

overdraft in the Upper San Pedro subwatershed related to the direct and indirect activities that support Fort Huachuca.

### **Proposed Action**

A Groundwater Replenishment and Augmentation District is proposed to assist the citizens of Cochise County to take actions to achieve sustainable yield in the Sierra Vista Subwatershed. The general principles for this district include:

1. The water management goal for the district will be established in statute.
2. Replenishment and augmentation of water supplies shall be consistent with the goal.
3. The district must prepare plans that identify areas of groundwater overdraft, projects that will mitigate declining water elevations for specific areas, water sources for the projects, and funding needs.
4. The district will be authorized to expend funds on water conservation and reuse programs to minimize water supply augmentation needs.
5. The district board will be elected through a district-wide election.
6. All water users within the district boundaries are members of the district by definition. The definitions will include a small domestic class of groundwater users, which will be defined as domestic or stock wells pumping less than 35 gallons per minute and irrigating less than two acres.
7. The district board will have the authority to adopt impact fees, replenishment fees and water use rates to fund the replenishment, augmentation and conservation projects for the district. The district may also issue revenue bonds.
8. Members existing as of the creation of the district will have their fees capped at the amount of money necessary to replenish the existing aquifer overdraft. The district board may establish a uniform, flat fee for persons that withdraw water from the small domestic class of wells.
9. Fees for new members will be based on the cost of obtaining new water supplies to replenish new groundwater withdrawals.
10. The Sierra Vista Subwatershed district is proposed to be established by act of the legislature. No subsequent districts are proposed at this time.
11. The county will have to adopt adequacy requirements for all new subdivisions before the district may be activated.
12. The statutes should include a statement of legislative policy that the activities of the district are meant to protect the health and safety of the district residents.