

Sustaining Flows of Critical Resources: One Example

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Abstract.—As growth of communities throughout the west accelerates into the 21st century, resources that were once unseen and unused, except, perhaps, by ranchers, are in increasing demand. This trend is particularly apparent on the Public Land. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is responsible for sustaining the availability, the flow, of many natural resources from substantive forest products, leasable minerals, and livestock forage to the less tangible resources of aesthetics, solitude, and recreational experiences. Resolving conflicts among the diverse and numerous users of Public Land has become one of BLM's primary responsibilities. The Upper San Pedro River Basin in southeast, Arizona, is an area where the conflicts have been persistent. In many ways sustaining the flow of resources in the Upper San Pedro Basin, including the flow of the river itself, is a metaphor for resource management in a settings of increasing consumptive use by growing communities.

In the reach managed by BLM the Upper San Pedro River is one of the few remaining free-flowing, perennial streams in the Southwest. It provides critical bird habitat; it is the home or potential home of several threatened or endangered species; it is a magnet for research; it is a treasure for the citizens of the nation and the local community. However, its flow depends on the groundwater, which is being pumped by nearby homeowners, irrigators, municipalities, and an Army fort faster than it is being recharged. The dilemma is clear to the City of Sierra Vista, the army, Cochise County, and BLM: if the river is to retain its present character, future pumping and water use must be limited, groundwater recharge must be increased, or new sources of water must be developed.

Currently, work is underway to preserve the river by identifying and quantifying the factors that affect the surface flow and the groundwater aquifer. This work is being organized and funded by a diverse and committed partnership. The Upper San Pedro Partnership is a group of federal, state, local governments working together with private entities to establish a water resources plan. A broad range of possible solutions to the dilemma of sustainability of resources for both consumption and preservation is being tested and analyzed. This poster displays the issues in the Upper San Pedro debate, provides an overview of the area and the proposed array of projects being considered. The first projects are focusing on quantification of current uses, and effluent and storm water recharge. Although the work of the partnership has just begun, the poster will support the central proposition that sustainable flow of critical resources requires sustainable relationships among resource managers, users and their communities.