

Subject: FYI: CEC San Pedro River Study Released and Other News**Date:** Tue, 16 Jun 1998 09:27:56 -0700**From:** Bruce Goff <bgoff@tucson.ars.ag.gov>**Organization:** USDA-ARS**To:** salsa-cooperator@tucson.ars.ag.gov

Dear San Pedro Observer:

Below are several recent articles concerning the hydrology and ecology of the Upper San Pedro River, and related regional issues. Please link to the original source website for more information.

B. Goff

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1. CEC San Pedro Study News

Arizona Daily Star (StarNet)

<http://www.azstarnet.com/>

Tuesday, 16 June 1998

Growth cap would slow river's decline, study says

By Keith Bagwell The Arizona Daily Star

The San Pedro River in Cochise County and its valuable wildlife habitat appear to be doomed to extinction, a new multinational study shows.

The Montreal-based Commission for Environmental Cooperation, created in conjunction with the North American Free Trade Agreement, used a one-year, \$55,000 study to confirm that pumping ground-water is drying the river.

``It's getting worse and will continue to get even worse over time,'' said Gregory A. Thomas, leader of the commission's six-member study team.

Thomas, of the San Francisco-based Natural Heritage Institute, said the study suggests several measures that would slow the water decline.

``But there still would not be a balance (of water use and replenishment),'' he said.

Wells now pump up to 7,000 acre-feet of water a year more than nature restores. The remedies suggested in the report would cut that deficit to 3,500 acre-feet a year by 2030, Thomas said.

``Without action, we estimate the deficit would be 14,000 acre-feet a year by 2030,'' he added.

The San Pedro begins in Sonora, Mexico, and flows as far north as the Gila River. It is a spring and early summer home to 1 million to 4 million migratory songbirds of about 500 species, some listed as endangered.

Tucson-based Southwest Center for Biological Diversity petitioned the commission to compile the report after a federal judge dismissed the center's lawsuit seeking to block Fort Huachuca growth because of the impact on the river.

The report rejected closing or cutting the size of Fort Huachuca, but advised capping its size at the current level.

``The fort has gone a long way to curb its water use with a combination of conservation and recharge,'' Thomas said.

``Also, closing the fort alone would not solve the problem and its economic value is high relative to its water use,'' he added.

Thomas said the study found the biggest single improvement would be to halt pumping for farm irrigation.

``Farming in the U.S. portion of the river basin has been declining since 1970, but 500 acres still are in production,'' he said. That's about 1,500 acre-feet a year of water use, he said.

``Agriculture in Mexico is increasing and substantial,'' Thomas said. ``If that was eliminated or reduced, it appears that would be of substantial benefit on both sides of the border.''

He said there are roughly 19 miles of the San Pedro and 19 miles of a major tributary, the Arroyo los Fresnos, in Sonora.

``The two governments could purposely shift the riparian values south of the border to create a binational preserve,'' he said. ``And let the northern reaches that now are protected decline.''

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management has a 43,400-acre San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area along several miles of the river in Cochise County.

The report suggests an array of water-conservation measures for Mexico, Cochise County, the fort, Sierra Vista and other towns to slow the river's decline.

It also calls for a multi-agency and binational planning effort to control growth in the area.

``Growth controls would be helpful and positive,'' Thomas said. ``Without them the situation will worsen and other water users would have to make larger sacrifices.''

Southwest Center Director Kieran Suckling said the report ``is a huge step. It confirms the San Pedro River is dying and we have to act decisively to save it.''

He said the report's advice to retire farms, create a development buffer around the conservation area and adopt growth-control plans should be followed.

``And the state should establish a water-management area like it has in every other urban area,'' Suckling said. ``We need a long-term management plan.''

Al Anderson, conservation chairman of the Huachuca Audubon Society, said he believes urban growth control is essential.

``Growth in the Sierra Vista area is totally uncontrolled - the city and

county are pro-growth at any cost," he said. ``Without a reversal of that, there is no hope for the San Pedro.''

Sierra Vista Mayor Richard Archer said he believes Mexico will not cooperate with U.S. efforts to protect the San Pedro, and growth control is unlikely.

``I don't know how to limit growth," he said. ``If the city does it alone, growth will go on - most of it is in the county now.''

But the city and fort recognize the water-use problem and are acting to resolve it, he said. ``It's correctable - the city and the fort are going to recharge (treated sewer) effluent," he added.

The Commission for Environmental Cooperation is the combined effort of Mexico, Canada and the U.S. working together to protect the environment.

2. CEC San Pedro Study Press Release

Subject: Press Release
Date: Mon, 15 Jun 1998 13:51:02 -0400
From: Corrie Castello <ccastell@ccemtl.org>
To: <newenglish@cec.org>

For release on Contact Richard Connor Monday, 15 June 1998 Commission for Environmental Cooperation Tel: (514) 350-4300 / e-mail: rconnor@ccemtl.org

CEC RELEASES STUDY OF THE UPPER SAN PEDRO RIVER

--Montreal, 15 June 1998.

The Secretariat of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)-created by a side accord to NAFTA-today released a public review draft of an expert report entitled "Sustaining and Enhancing Riparian Migratory Bird Habitat on the Upper San Pedro River." The San Pedro is a binational river that serves as an important corridor for millions of migratory songbirds that winter in Mexico and breed during the summer months in the United States and Canada.

The study was prepared by an independent team of experts and describes the environmental conditions needed to protect the riparian migratory bird habitat on the Upper San Pedro River. The study also outlines a number of conservation measures and water management strategies that could help to ensure the preservation of this valuable habitat.

The release of the draft expert study marks the beginning of a sixty-day public comment period. Public participation is essential to the successful outcome of the San Pedro Initiative and any comments, questions or other relevant input to the expert study are welcome. A series of consultative workshops are scheduled to be held in southern Arizona in late July. Similar outreach activities in Sonora are currently under discussion. The public comment period ends Friday, August 14.

Any person or group wishing to obtain a copy of the draft report, or wanting to submit comments, may do so by contacting the CEC Secretariat or to the Udall Center at the addresses provided below.

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Secretariat: 514-350-4300, or by e-mail at rconnor@ccemtl.org.

3. General Speaks Out on Environment

Sierra Vista Herald
<http://www.svherald.com/>

General speaks out on the environment

BILL HESS / Herald/Review / June 9, 1998

FORT HUACHUCA - Despite what some environmentalists believe, the existence of the post is not solely responsible for growth in the area and its impact on the San Pedro River, Maj. Gen. Charles Thomas said.

"Do I think we are solely responsible for the threat on the San Pedro River, of course I don't. That is a shared responsibility," the general said. "I refuse to say all those snowbirds who come here from Canada, Montana or North Dakota are my responsibility. I think they would have found this beautiful place anyway." The general believes the community missed an opportunity to start addressing the water deficit more than three years ago when a proposed management plan for the Sierra Vista area was shouted down on "bloody Saturday." Saying he has a personal opinion, which will make some angry "but not the right people," Thomas said if proposals by the Water Issues Group had been accepted instead of turned down the area could have been closer to solving some of the deficit problems in the basin.

The general said the hard work of people such as Walter Patton, then president of Cochise College, and Judy Gignac, who heads the Bella Vista Water Company, and others was defeated by emotionalism created by a fear of environmental extremists.

"It slowed the process down," Thomas said of the angry meeting which took place Jan. 14, 1995.

He made his comments Monday afternoon as he looked back on his three and a half year tenure as commander of the Intelligence Center and Fort Huachuca.

Thomas will be leaving June 18 after a 7:30 a.m. change of command ceremony.

What the general said he was proudest of were the environmental successes on the post.

"Federal, state or local agencies cannot match what we've done here," Thomas said.

Noting the fort is not just for soldiers and their families, he said the post is visited by many people, especially bird watchers who appreciate what they can see in the five different ecological systems on the installation.

Many of the birders are members of the Audubon Society or Sierra Club.

Neither of those organizations is "exactly in the middle of the road when it comes to conservation matters" but they seem to appreciate "what we have done here," Thomas said.

While not only ensuring the canyons remain in as pristine a condition as possible, the post has had an aggressive water conservation program to the detriment of some trees, the general said.

"We've paid a price. Drive around the post. Drive up to my house where a giant cottonwood went by the boards last week," Thomas said. A hole marks where the cottonwood, which was higher than a three-story house, once stood.

The reason for the tree's demise is "we are not deep watering," the general said and it is costing the post "some of the great old shade trees." Through stringent conservation efforts the post is constantly increasing the amount of water it is saving. That does not mean more cannot be done, he said.

Thomas said he wishes he had more money to put into conservation efforts on the post, especially in aquifer recharge. "I accept we are one of the major stakeholders and as such we are good stewards. But there needs to be more ways found to practice good water management by working with the city and county," he said.

Thomas said he also regrets the fort's Draft Environmental Impact Statement has taken so long to be completed. The draft is in the process of being sent out for public comment.

The draft study, along with an in-depth review of all studies of the area being done by Harvard University as part of an Army contract, will help people in the San Pedro River basin help decide their future, the general said.

He also said the North American Free Trade Agreement's Commission for Environmental Cooperation review of the river, which is expected to be released Monday, is another tool people need to use. Thomas said people need to ensure their views are heard and be part of the public input process.

"Everyone needs to work with the environment so that it benefits us all without ruining the environment - and we can do that," he said.

4. Border Wetlands Project

The Bisbee Observer

<http://www.theriver.com/bisbeeobserver/>

Second Week of June, 1998

Both sides of border work on Naco wetlands project

This Border Ecology Project continues its work toward a sound environment along the border by being involved with a Naco, Sonora, wetlands project.

May 27 was the ground breaking and ribbon cutting for a project being done cooperatively by several agencies on both sides of the border, according to Marc Coles-Ritchie of Border Ecology Project.

' 'The Naco Constructed Wetlands Microenterprise Project seeks to

demonstrate the unique advantages that wetlands treatment offers communities such as Naco which traditionally lack not only wastewater infrastructure, but economic opportunity and wildlife habitat as well,' Coles-Ritchie said.

Today constructed wetlands are an accepted means to treat municipal wastewater in man-made, marshlike environments, according to information released by BEP. The wetlands planned for Naco is a subsurface-flow constructed wetlands, specifically engineered to maintain all wastewater below ground. Mosquitoes can therefore not lay eggs in the water and odors are eliminated. While wetlands have such as this been built throughout North America, none have been designed with the intention of integrating them with appropriately chosen agriculturally based micro-enterprises, a goal that potentially generates new income sources and - by raising community stakes in the wastewater treatment process - increases likelihood of the treatment plant's success as well.

A small (600 square meter) constructed wetland wastewater treatment demonstration project will be built at the periphery of Naco, Sonora's, soon-to-be-expanded wastewater treatment facility. A small portion (approximately 10,000 liters per day) of effluent from the final lagoon will be routed through the wetland for polishing prior to being made available for irrigation. Local botanists are currently preparing a list of candidate species for the wetlands which will be reviewed with participating community members. Preferred species include riparian trees which will be grown in an innovative 'double bucket' system to facilitate removal of saplings for transplanting and replacement with new seedlings, such as yerba mansa, for Mexico's herbal market. A third crop to be investigated is birdhouse gourds, which can be grown and sold directly to U.S. wildbird store owners, or fashioned in the community into finished products for mail-order sale. Project sponsors will host workshops to promote knowledge of the various proposed crops and marketing requirements and to solicit and develop marketing ideas from within the community.

The proposed project will create the first treatment wetlands in the state of Sonora and will provide the entire border region with a valuable model on integrated, environmentally based micro-enterprise development. Measurable scientific benefits will include assessment of riparian tree growth rates using treated effluent and associated water quality enhancement. Target results include: inspiring the use of wetland systems to meet future community wastewater treatment needs; reproducing the proposed project in at least three other Sonoran communities in the next two years; and generating additional grant funds to develop those projects.

5. U.S.-Mexico Environmental Indicators Report

Subject: U.S.-Mexico Environmental Indicators Report
Date: Fri, 12 Jun 1998 16:02:52 -0400 (EDT)
From: Joseph Makuch <jmakuch@nal.usda.gov>
To: enviro-news@nal.usda.gov

FOR RELEASE: FRIDAY, JUNE 12, 1998

U.S. AND MEXICO COMPLETE FIRST BINATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS REPORT

The first cooperative effort by the United States and Mexico to develop ways of measuring environmental and health quality in the border area has been completed and details are available in the Border Environmental Indicators Report. Indicators reflect progress toward goals, milestones and objectives on environmental and ecosystem

quality.

The report was released by Carol M. Browner, Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Julia Carabias Lillo, Mexico's Secretary of Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries, at the Binational Commission Meeting held in Washington, D.C. Measuring progress in meeting environmental goals throughout the U.S. is a key component of EPA's Strategic Plan. The border's pollution problems and resource constraints make it an important area for ensuring that the Agency's work is directed toward high-priority problems, and indicators are an important tool for ensuring that cooperative projects produce sustained improvements in ecological and human health. By measuring the effectiveness of EPA's cooperative border programs through indicators, the Agency and its partners will be able to more efficiently plan ways to address significant threats to the environment and human health in both countries.

The report covers nine areas: air, water, environmental health, hazardous and solid waste, enforcement and compliance, pollution prevention, natural resources, contingency planning and emergency response, and environmental information resources. The report was developed as part of the 1996 Border XXI program, a cooperative program by Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, and involving the Mexican government, state and local agencies, tribal nations, community and business groups.

Copies of the report and other Border XXI documents are available by calling 1-800-334-0741. Several Border XXI documents are available on the EPA Border XXI web page at: <http://www.epa.gov/usmexicoborder>. The indicators report will be posted on the web page in a few weeks.

<http://www.epa.gov/epahome/press.htm>

6. More About Mexico Fires

Arizona Daily Star (StarNet)

<http://www.azstarnet.com/>

Friday, 12 June 1998

Mexican fires pose little threat to U.S.

WASHINGTON (AP) - The smoke from fires in southern Mexico that raised air pollution fears in Texas in recent weeks now poses little threat to the United States, researchers say.

Some of the blazes continue to burn, with smoke drifting off that country's Pacific Coast.

The U.S. National Weather Service's forecast through Saturday predicts smoke will continue to drift to the northwest but says no visible smoke should be noticed over Texas.

``The overall impact of this smoke on eastern Mexico and the southern United States appears minimal,' ' the weather service said.

For Mexico, the fires pose an environmental hazard, threatening hundreds of endangered plant species in the Chimalapas biological reserve, one of the most important tropical rain forests in the Americas, according to Brian Atwood, head of the Agency for International Development.

A health alert caused by the drifting smoke over Texas was lifted May 28 when the smoke cleared after about three gloomy weeks. At its worst, the haze covered much of the Gulf Coast and Southeast and was apparent as far north as North Dakota.

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