

News Release: July 20, 2005

# Fort Huachuca admits groundwater pumping directly harming San Pedro River!

Lawsuit forces release of previously censored report finding “likely” that Fort Huachuca/Sierra Vista groundwater pumping now directly affecting San Pedro

Fort Huachuca has been forced by Center for Biological Diversity lawsuit to release a previously censored report showing that excessive local groundwater pumping is now directly affecting the San Pedro River. The report is titled, “Memorandum for Record; Subject: Compilation and analysis of April 1995 to April 2005 Water-Level Data at monitoring and Test Wells, Fort Huachuca AZ.” It is dated May 15, 2005. The report was released this week as a result of a lawsuit by the Center for Biological Diversity against Fort Huachuca.<sup>1</sup> The lawsuit over Fort Huachuca’s cover-up of San Pedro related documents has been ongoing since October 2003.<sup>2</sup>

The previously censored report states,

“To better quantify the impact of Fort Huachuca/Sierra Vista groundwater pumping on baseflow to the San Pedro River over time, the installation of seven monitoring wells was completed in December 1994...

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<sup>1</sup> CBD v. DoD 2003

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Conclusion...it is likely this decline in water levels currently extends to the river, resulting in a reduction of groundwater discharge to the river when compared to predevelopment conditions.”<sup>3</sup>

San Pedro River stream flow reflects the surface of the area’s groundwater aquifer, or the water table itself.<sup>4</sup> San Pedro River stream flow during the driest times of the year seeps directly from the groundwater aquifer into the River.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the deficit groundwater pumping in the Fort Huachuca/Sierra Vista area results from Department of Defense funded activities.<sup>6</sup> Fort Huachuca is responsible for between 54% and 82% of the area’s deficit groundwater pumping.<sup>7</sup> The area’s groundwater deficit has increased by 134.3%, from -5,144 acre-feet per year as cited in the August 23, 2002, Biological Opinion,<sup>8</sup> to -12,050 acre-feet per year as cited in USGS data released on July 7, 2005.<sup>9</sup> Since 2002, Fort Huachuca’s activities have been increasing similarly.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, San Pedro River base flow, or water in the stream during the driest time of the year, is decreasing dramatically.<sup>11</sup>

On July 4, 2005, for the first time in recorded history, the San Pedro River ran dry at the USGS Charleston gage at the Charleston Narrows.<sup>12</sup> Fort Huachuca’s monitoring wells are located just to the west of the San Pedro River and the area of the USGS Charleston gage at the Charleston Narrows.<sup>13</sup> San Pedro River stream flow at the Charleston Narrows is the most sensitive indicator of the health of the Upper San Pedro watershed’s groundwater aquifer.<sup>14</sup> Bedrock there at the surface of the river channel forces the San Pedro River’s entire sub-surface flow to the surface.<sup>15</sup>

Similar reports and opinions to this new report have been used by Fort Huachuca in the past to argue against the Fort Huachuca/Sierra Vista groundwater pumping center directly affecting the San Pedro River.<sup>16</sup> These reports were not censured.<sup>17</sup>

Similar past reports and the opinion of the author of these reports were featured in Fort Huachuca’s July 2002, Biological Assessment and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’ August 23, 2002, Biological Opinion. The Biological Assessment and the Biological Opinion concluded that the local groundwater pumping was not directly affecting the River and that mitigation could take place over nearly a decade.<sup>18</sup> Fort Huachuca attorneys have now ordered that “no well monitoring reports will be used in any future biological opinions or biological assessments.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> ACOE 2005.

<sup>4</sup> ACOE 1970; ACOE 1974; ADWR 1994b; CEC 1999b; USGS 1999a, 1999b

<sup>5</sup> ADWR 1988, 1991, 1994b; CEC 1999b; CEQ 1981; USGS 1999a; USFWS 1999e, 2002

<sup>6</sup> CBD v. DoD 1999, p9 “(Admin. Rec. Ex. 32; Draft BO at 108-110)”; Fort Huachuca 2002c; Sierra Vista Herald 2004e; USFWS 1999b, 1999c, 2002

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Fort Huachuca 2002c, p, 88, Appendix K; USFWS 2002, p. 90

<sup>9</sup> Department of the Interior 2005, Appendix C – Sierra Vista Subwatershed Ground-Water Budget, Table C1. Summarization of predevelopment ground-water budgets for the Sierra Vista Subwatershed, USGS 2003 data; Fort Huachuca 2002c, p, 88, Appendix K; USFWS 2002, p. 90

<sup>10</sup> ACOE 2003, 2005; ADWR 2004a; Arizona Corporation Commission 2002, 2003, 2004; Arizona Daily Star 2004a; Border Patrol 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Department of Interior 2005; FHA 2004; Fort Huachuca 2003c, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2005b; SBA 2005; Sierra Vista Herald 2003c, 2003d, 2004a, 2004c, 2004d; 2004e, 2004g, 2004h, 2004i, 2004k, 2004l, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d; USFWS 2002; USGS 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e 2005f; VA 2004a, 2004b

<sup>11</sup> ADWR 1996b; CEC 1999b; USGS 1999a, 2005b

<sup>12</sup> USGS 2005d

<sup>13</sup> ACOE 1998, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2005; USGS 2005e

<sup>14</sup> USGS 1999a

<sup>15</sup> ADWR 1988; USGS 1999a

<sup>16</sup> ACOE 1998, 1999, 2002

<sup>17</sup> ACOE 1997, 1998, 1999, 2002

<sup>18</sup> Fort Huachuca 2002c; USFWS 2002

<sup>19</sup> Fort Huachuca 2005c.

The Pentagon is also currently attempting a cover-up of Fort Huachuca's water problems to the 2005, Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission.<sup>20</sup> The Pentagon failed to disclose to the BRAC Commission the fact that an adequate supply of water does not exist in the Fort Huachuca area to provide for (1) San Pedro River stream base flow, (2) for civilian community demand, and (3) for Federal reserved water rights, including Fort Huachuca's current and future needs.<sup>21</sup> Fort Huachuca's Federal reserved water rights total 7,549 acre-feet/year.<sup>22</sup> Bureau of Land Management's San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area Federal reserved water rights total 11,028 acre-feet/year at the Charleston gage.<sup>23</sup> The most current estimate of total recharge in the area equals 18,000 acre-feet per year.<sup>24</sup> This means that total Federal reserved water rights in the watershed account for 103% of the area's entire annual natural recharge.<sup>25</sup>

In 1988, Congress designated the upper San Pedro River as the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA).<sup>26</sup> Congress assigned SPRNCA stewardship to the Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management (BLM).<sup>27</sup> The BLM, SPRNCA and the San Pedro have not received their share of water for 69% (122/178) of all months on record (November 1988 through September 2003) at the Charleston gage as of December 2, 2004.<sup>28</sup> This shortfall represents an accumulating deficit to date of 34,819 acre-feet.<sup>29</sup>

The interpretation of Fort Huachuca's monitoring well data that the Fort Huachuca/Sierra Vista groundwater pumping is directly affecting the San Pedro is supported by newly reviewed USGS data showing reduced water seeping from the regional aquifer to the San Pedro River in the Lewis Springs area.<sup>30</sup> Lewis Springs is located upstream from Fort Huachuca immediately adjacent to the San Pedro River.

On July 4, 2005, the San Pedro River ran dry at the Charleston gage for the first time since recordings began in 1904.<sup>31</sup> From July 4 through July 19, the River has been dry at this gage.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> DoD 2004, 2005a, 2005b

<sup>21</sup> ACOE 2005; ADWR 1992a, 1996b; BLM 1987, 1991; Cappaert v. United States 426 U.S. 128 [1976]; CBD 2004e, 2005a, 2005b; CEC 1999b; Department of Interior 2005; Endangered Species Act, Sections 2, 7 and 9; Fort Huachuca 2002a, 2002c; Kansas v. Colorado, 115 S. Ct. 1995; Nebraska v. Wyoming, 115 S. Ct. 1033, 1937 [1995]; U.S. Army 2003b; U.S. Congress 1988; USFWS 1999e, 2002, p. 92; USGS 1999a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e, 2005f

<sup>22</sup> Fort Huachuca 2002a

<sup>23</sup> ADWR 1992a; BLM 1991

<sup>24</sup> Department of Interior 2005

<sup>25</sup> ADWR 1992a, 2004; Fort Huachuca 2002a

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Congress 1988

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> ADWR 1992a; U.S. Congress 1988; USGS 2004b

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> USGS 2005a

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<sup>32</sup> USGS 2005f

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