



**SKY
ISLAND**
ALLIANCE
Protecting our Mountain Islands
and Desert Seas

**Comments on Sustainability to the
Regional Water Study Oversight Committee
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Sky Island Alliance is a grassroots organization dedicated to the protection and restoration of the rich natural heritage of native species and habitats in the Sky Island region of the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. We work with volunteers, scientists, land owners, public officials, and government agencies to establish protected areas, restore healthy landscapes, and promote public appreciation of the region's unique biological diversity.

The importance of in-stream flows, sub-surface waters, riparian areas, and the impacts of water delivery infrastructure.

Approximately 90% of the wildlife in the arid southwestern US is dependent on aquatic and riparian resources to fulfill some part of their life history. While a majority of aquatic systems in Pima County have been lost a few remain such as the San Pedro River and Ciénega Creek and are therefore extremely important to protect. Riparian ecosystems supported by shallow groundwater have also been largely lost or degraded due to water diversions, aquifer drawdown and urbanization but can still be found across the county in places like Sabino Creek, Davidson Canyon, Rincon Creek and Sopori Wash..

Our riparian areas also play host to an amazing abundance of rare and endangered species such as the Chiricahua leopard frog and the Mexican gartersnake, black hawks and gray hawks, the Huachuca water umbel and the Canelo Hills ladies tresses, and of course our highly-adapted desert fish.

Beside the obvious benefits of providing water, shade, cover and breeding habitat for animals another important aspect of these aquatic and riparian areas are the connectivity they provide across the landscape and across many barriers, for the daily and seasonal movements and dispersal of animals and plants. For example a mountain lion needs more than 200 square miles in its home range and our Sky Island mountain ranges and other protected areas average less than 50 square miles and so lions must travel between these ranges across the lowlands to find mates and prey and to disperse into unoccupied habitat, and the washes and riparian we are talking about provide the shelter and safe transit needed to achieve this.

Riparian vegetation along watercourses contributes to the retention of water on the landscape. Floodwaters are slowed, soils are held in place by roots and more water infiltrates into the ground.

Protection of riparian areas and aquatic ecosystems also benefits local economies through increased home values, increased recreational opportunities and increased well being as people connect with natural settings.

Our recommendations to this committee include:

Protection of our remaining aquatic and riparian ecosystems through the establishment of no-pumping zones where pumping would draw down shallow ground water and no-touch buffer around existing riparian habitat.

We must have a dedicated effluent pool to jumpstart restoration efforts of our degraded riparian ecosystems and to maintain the existing diversity of these systems in the Tucson Basin.

Finally we must implement land-use provisions and reform state law to ensure that future population growth and associated water needs do not exceed available supplies nor impact existing and restorable water dependent ecosystems.

We must also resist the urge to import un-sustainable and environmentally detrimental supplies of water from outside the Tucson Basin. The infrastructure and methods proposed so far to make more outside water available will have large un-reversible impacts to landscapes and wildlife.

In closing I would like to quote an old friend “Growth for growth’s sakes is the ideology of a cancer cell” we can grow but we must grow under the environmental constraints this amazing desert provides.

Thank you for your consideration
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