



## **ISC approves modifications to proposals to divert water**

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**By JIM OWEN**

Daily Press Staff

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The state Interstate Stream Commission on Tuesday approved modifications to proposals to divert water from the Gila River.

Seven of 15 projects being evaluated under the Arizona Water Settlements Act underwent revisions. Only three of the proposed initiatives were made available for public review and comment before Tuesday's meeting.

Three projects calling for large-scale water diversions from the river were approved for modification, "without any public review or comment on preliminary engineering analyses," according to the Silver City-based Gila Conservation Coalition.

"This is nothing new for ISC staff. Throughout the 10-year planning process, the staff has consistently tried to limit public participation under the Arizona Water Settlements Act," said Allyson Siwik, executive director of the coalition. She added: "We are very concerned that the ISC approved changes to four diversion projects without any public input. Engineering information was available to allow staff to make these recommended changes, but the information has not been shared with stakeholders. This lack of transparency is unacceptable, and contributes to the ongoing perception that the ISC disregards its own process as it pursues a Gila River diversion project. The ISC needs to immediately make this information publicly available."

The Arizona Water Settlements Act of 2004 gave New Mexico the option to divert water from the Gila River, if the state agreed to pay for water from Arizona to replace what is diverted.

The AWSA provided \$66 million for community water projects to meet local water needs, and up to \$62 million more if New Mexico elects to divert water from the river.

Among the proposals under review are:

- Southwest Regional Water Supply System, involving river diversion, water storage and distribution to communities in the Mimbres River basin;
- Gila Basin Irrigation Commission Diversion and Storage, another scheme to

take water from the river;

- Hidalgo County Diversion and Storage, which would use river water for environmental and agricultural needs in the Virden area;
- Grant County Water Commission Infrastructure and Re-Use, involving the withdrawal of water from a well field near the county airport to supply areacommunities;
- Grant County Effluent Re-Use and Reservoir, in which treated effluent from the sewage-treatment plant in Bayard would be pumped to a reservoir for swimming and fishing near Fort Bayard;
- Catron County Watershed Improvement, the improvement of irrigation ditches and construction of storage ponds, and treethinning and restoration work in forest areas damaged bywildfires;
- Luna Ditch and Pleasanton Ditch improvements featuring new linings; and
- Gila Conservation Coalition Municipal Conservation, a plan involving methods to consume less water.