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7/19/2013 6:01:00 AM

## McCain, Flake urge communities to create water plan together

Joanna Dodder Nellans  
 The Daily Courier

COTTONWOOD - A "call to action" from U.S. senators John McCain and Jeff Flake seeking a Verde River Watershed plan gained a positive reaction Wednesday from Verde Valley officials.



Joanna Dodder/The Daily Courier  
 Children wade in Sedona's Oak Creek, a tributary of the Verde River.

The Middle Verde subcommittee of the Yavapai County Water Advisory Committee agreed to respond with a letter that thanks Arizona's U.S. senators for their interest and looks forward to cooperative efforts.

Subcommittee members said the timing is perfect, because a major U.S. Bureau of Reclamation study about potential future water sources for Verde Watershed residents is likely to be released within a few months.

"It's clear that the current water uses in the Verde River Watershed are unsustainable, with communities on a path that will distress the Verde River, dry up groundwater wells, and weaken the economic prosperity of the area," the senators wrote June 27.

"We urge you to lead your community into taking a new path that balances current uses with future growth in a manner that protects the river for the enjoyment of future generations. We stand ready to help you in that effort."

The senators sent the letter to the chairs of the Yavapai and Gila county boards of supervisors; the mayors of Prescott, Prescott Valley, Sedona, Camp Verde, Cottonwood, Clarkdale and Jerome; and the chairs of the Yavapai-Prescott, Yavapai-Apache, and Fort McDowell Yavapai nations.

One Middle Verde subcommittee member noted that McCain has a home in the Verde Valley.

The letter notes that the latest U.S. Geological Survey study and water budget for the Verde Valley indicates that the Verde baseflow could decrease as much as 8,600 acre-feet during the coming century while some wells go dry, and some of the decrease is attributable to groundwater withdrawals in the Upper Verde Basin where Prescott-area communities are located.

"We believe the study serves as a call to action," the letter said. It asks for a "long-term water management strategy for the Verde River."

It could be a challenge for the Verde Basin communities to work together on such a plan, however, since the only group that brings all the local elected officials together could now be falling apart.

Yavapai County Water Advisory Committee members agreed in March to reduce their monthly meetings to gatherings as needed in 2013, and split into two subcommittees that meet monthly.

Then the Prescott and PV councils said they would quit the Water Advisory Committee if it didn't agree to their request to cut their dues. The committee agreed and the county followed suit.

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It's unclear whether the Upper Verde communities plan to form a subcommittee, or how they feel about the senators' letter. Water Committee Co-Chair Steve Blair, a Prescott City Council member, apparently was unavailable for comment Thursday.

And now the Cottonwood City Council has voted against joining the Middle Verde subcommittee after failing to attend any of its meetings so far.

"The creation of two sub-WACs seems to be counter to the original intent, which was to provide a forum for both sides to air their differences and concerns and to work together on developing regional management plans for the sustainable use of water supplies," Cottonwood Mayor Diane Joens wrote to the YC Water Advisory Committee co-chairs July 12. "We believe that separating into two sub-WACs will only lead to greater divisiveness than already exists."

Cottonwood cut its dues, and the mayor's letter incorrectly accused the subcommittee of trying to add new members and set regional water policy. It also protested the subcommittee's decision to move away from consensus decisions to majority voting.

The county Water Committee was formed in 1999 to foster communications between the Middle and Upper Verde regions. At the time, Middle Verde officials were loudly opposing Prescott's plans to build a pipeline to access groundwater in the neighboring Big Chino Aquifer.

A decade of studies and data collection culminated with the 2011 release of a U.S. Geological Survey state-of-the-art computer model that could help communities understand how their future groundwater use might affect the flow of the river, since its baseflow is dependent upon groundwater.

But then Prescott and Prescott Valley balked at using the computer model, fearing the public might misinterpret how their plans to pump the Big Chino Aquifer might affect the river. Prescott-area residents of the Little Chino Sub-basin are depleting their groundwater supplies. Scientists generally agree that the Big Chino provides at least 80 percent of the Upper Verde's baseflow.

The new U.S. Bureau of Reclamation study will list potential future sources of water for a growing Verde Basin human population. Subcommittee members agreed Wednesday to reach out to the public to help people understand the study when it's released.

The next step would be for the Yavapai County Water Advisory Committee to choose a limited number of potential future water sources that the Bureau of Rec can study in more detail.

But Middle Verde Water Advisory Committee members noted Wednesday that such a study for the Coconino Plateau will cost about \$13 million, and it's less complex than a Verde Basin study would be.

They wondered out loud where the millions would come from, especially in light of federal sequester budget cuts. Carrying out any plan would cost much more.

Dan Campbell, recently retired from The Nature Conservancy and now on the Verde River Institute board, said the message of the Bureau of Rec study might be that Verde Basin residents need to live with the water they already have.

"That means talking to our neighbors to the north," he said.

He suggested the Verde communities use the USGS model to figure out the best sites to withdraw and recharge groundwater supplies on a regional basis. The San Pedro River Basin already is doing this with its model, he said.

"You have to change the way water is delivered in the Verde Valley," agreed Greg Kornrumpf of the Salt River Project, which has major water rights on the Verde River for its Phoenix-area customers.

The Gila River Basin court adjudication process that has been going on since 1974 is hindering efforts to quantify local water rights and pool water supply efforts, Kornrumpf said.



### Reader Comments

Posted: Saturday, July 20, 2013

Article comment by: **Arizona Dog**

As I suggested, the big money is looking at control over water, enter the Senators.

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Let the Verde communities work toward a management and restoration plan. Restoration is the key to improving flows. However, don't expect Senatorial clout, taking on the sand and gravel operations, golf courses and the questionable diversions and pumping interest.

The Verde flows through McCain's back yard and probably believes it would dry up, which it won't. But downstream, what a mess. I could see the Upper Verde communities funding some of the mitigation downstream in restoring the middle Verde from above Clardale to past Camp Verde. If there was a working restoration plan, then funding the mitigation would make sense. Management of what, mother nature, no, it needs to be an restoration of the ecology.

Posted: Saturday, July 20, 2013

Article comment by: **Alas, the mayors and councils of Prescott and PV didn't hear this plea.**

Their ignorant heads are buried in the sand. And their growth at any cost buddies have stuffed cotton in their ears.

Posted: Friday, July 19, 2013

Article comment by: **R S**

The democrats and Republicans are the cause of amnesty and all the crap we hve been sold the past 180 yrs.  
A pox on both their houses.

Posted: Friday, July 19, 2013

Article comment by: **Heads Up McCain Flake, Gossar & the Rest**

ATTENTION: Worth your salt John McCain, Gossar, Flake and other AZ political representatives?

Prescott is dying on the vine!!! Lack of local political clout/knowledge is paramount!

Drug addicts, alxies, half way houses, druggie facilities, drug dealers have taken over historic Prescott on your watch!!! Cutie prostitutes are walking the streets attempting to cash in on the new drug industry in Prescott. Make you sick? Hark, ostriches!

There is no legislation in place to stop or regulate the drug facilities.

Love Arizona? Wake up, do your job. Spend the time/energy to clean up this mess because local officials do not have the knowledge or wherewithal to do so!

HELP!!! Governor Jan, HELP!

Water issues, no one is listening. Get a grip, 1000's of these addicts are being imported that have not a clue that we have a water shortage and could care less.

Addicts have created so many problems in Prescott. Check with the Prescott PD and the quaint historic neighborhoods they have invaded.

Druggie rehab white vans are swarming this first capitol of Arizona. Shame!

Get priorities straight legislators, this is an ASAP problem that you best take care of in emergency action!

Arizona is known for "talk, stall, ignore it, and speak in generalities"... a 70 yr resident speaking.

I have never witnessed such an easier "takeover" by an unsavory element in the guise of "helping them discover themselves" accompanied by, a getting rich scheme.

Hey, McCain, you want to save face after all the faux pas? Get an emergency bill passed to license, strict health restrictions with enforcement provisions for drug addict/alcoholic rehab facilities in the state of AZ Heavy fines/fees for violations included!

Drug facilities have no health regulations, and present high risk to public health. Do something, get on this issue NOW! Prescott is worth saving from this blight!

Posted: Friday, July 19, 2013

Article comment by: **Billy Jack**

I don't take anything these two politicians say seriously. These RHINO's have proven themselves enemies to the Republic because of their stand with illegals. At election time, I'm going to do everything I can to campaign against them...

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**A:** Granite Mountain Hotshot Memorial shirts are available locally at all Alberston's, Fry's, and Safeway stores in the...

**Q:** \* If I write a letter to the editor on line will it be published in the 'real' newspaper as well as online?

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