

The Daily Courier

Thursday, August 29, 2013

Prescott, SRP move forward with enhanced Big Chino monitoring

[Cindy Barks](#)

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PRESCOTT - Equipment for collection of data that will go toward a "more refined" groundwater model in the Big Chino Sub-basin could be in place by next spring.

On Tuesday, the [Prescott City Council](#) approved a contract with the [Salt River Project](#) (SRP) for the implementation of an enhanced surface-water monitoring system in the Paulden-area sub-basin.

The project relates to the September 2012 agreement that the [City of Prescott](#), the [Town of Prescott Valley](#), and SRP approved to work toward an improved monitoring system that would generate data for a more refined (nested) groundwater model for the Big Chino Sub-basin and its connection with the Upper Verde River, according to a city memo.

This week's contract agreement will put SRP in charge of installing monitoring equipment at eight ephemeral (short-term and intermittent) streams within the Big Chino area. Prescott City Manager Craig McConnell noted this week that SRP would be acting as an independent contractor in implementing the project.

The September 2012 agreement split the cost of the monitoring and modeling work between the three participating parties.

Since then, the parties have made initial contributions, and the account balance totaled \$508,738 in mid-April, the city memo stated. Money is available in the account to cover the \$86,947 installation cost, and an annual operation and maintenance cost of \$96,000, the memo added.

Prior to Tuesday's vote, City Councilman Charlie Arnold brought up compliance with Proposition 401, the 2009 voter initiative measure that requires the city to take any project costing \$40 million or more to a vote of the public.

"This question keeps consistently coming up on Prop. 401," Arnold said, asking McConnell to explain "our reasoning for why this doesn't apply under 401."

McConnell said a number of discussions have taken place on the applicability of the Taxpayer Protection Initiative (Prop. 401). Under the city's interpretation, he said, the Proposition 401 issue is "moot," because the September 2012 comprehensive agreement is "explicitly related to demonstration of feasibility" - a use that is exempt in Proposition 401.

The 2012 agreement followed through on a settlement that the three sides approved in February 2010, effectively ending the litigation that had been going on for years between the Phoenix-area utility company and the two area communities.

Previously, Prescott and Prescott Valley had been engaged in a legal dispute with SRP over local plans to pump thousands of acre-feet of water from the Big Chino Water Ranch to the tri-city area through a 30-mile pipeline.

SRP, which claims senior downstream rights to Verde River water, had long maintained that the large-scale pumping in the Big Chino, which is near the headwaters of the Verde, could harm the flow of the river.

This past September, representatives from all three entities maintained that the additional information from the enhanced monitoring and modeling would help to more accurately determine the impacts to the aquifer.

This week, Mayor Marlin Kuykendall lauded the efforts to put money toward the creation of "real science" rather than toward legal costs.

The city expects the new stream flow equipment to be in place by spring 2014.

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