

CWAG Current Issue Advisory

Watershed Restoration & Recharge Initiative

Description of Planned Project:

The Upper Verde River Watershed Protection Coalition has announced a Watershed Restoration & Recharge Initiative intended to increase natural recharge throughout the Upper Verde Watershed. Both sub-basins in the watershed are threatened by groundwater overdrafts. In the Prescott AMA, pumping exceeds recharge by approximately 13,000 acre-feet/yr, averaged over the last decade. Legally authorized future groundwater pumping in the Big Chino Sub-basin will, over time, greatly diminish and possibly eliminate the base flow of the upper Verde River.

The Coalition would like to reduce overly dense vegetation and invasive plants that transpire and evaporate water, thereby decreasing the recharge of scarce rainfall. Their target is to increase recharge by 20,000 acre-feet/yr, an increase of 50%. The Coalition has no funds for what would have to be a massive project; instead they intend to seek grant funds and to work cooperatively with other land managers and property owners in the region.

Additional information is available from

<http://www.uvrwpc.org/BoardMtg/UVRWPC.Agenda.032812.pdf>

Potential Environmental Effects:

- Destruction of natural landscape vegetation and wildlife habitat
- Increased soil erosion
- Spread of non-native plants
- Fragmentation of wildlife migration paths
- Uncertain effectiveness

CWAG's Concerns and Intentions:

CWAG intends to work with the Coalition on the development of this project, providing assistance wherever we can. We want to assure that landscape restoration efforts have a rational, scientific basis and that environmental impacts are acceptable. We are concerned that the project target is extremely ambitious. It will require massive acreages of public and private lands to be treated and maintained for the long term. The cost will be substantial and no funding is available. Most of the target area is arid, receiving 12" of precipitation annually. Previous studies have shown only minor benefits from vegetation management in higher rainfall areas.