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## High Country News

For people who care about the West

# Don't pop the cork yet

letters - October 29, 2007 by *Michelle Harrington*

Despite the odd title - "A downside to downing dams?" - the relatively positive restoration story provided a glimpse into the inherent complexity of dam removal (*HCN*, 10/01/07). But there is much more to the Fossil Creek story.

Getting to the point of dam removal is seldom easy. The Fossil Creek power plant decommissioning (done) and dam lowering (not yet completed) took years of discussion between Arizona Public Service and conservation groups and included the intervention in relicensing by two organizations. A settlement agreement was reached. But even then, it took several more years for various agencies to sign off on the plan and allow for the final Federal Energy Regulatory Commission approval of the decommissioning. It is due to the dogged efforts by conservationists that scientists are now able to study the results of flow restoration and dam lowering on Fossil Creek.

All of the marvelously rapid self-healing and scientifically interesting things that are going on in Fossil Creek could be lost, however, if the Forest Service doesn't step up and properly manage this area. Since the return of full flows to the creek, visitation has increased dramatically. Our groups have formally requested that the Coconino and Tonto forest supervisors immediately issue an emergency order to manage some recreational uses and to provide porta-johns and water quality monitoring in heavy use areas.

Fossil Creek Wild and Scenic designation bills are currently before Congress (S. 86 and H.R. 199). They must be heard by assigned committees and approved by Congress so that the Forest Service will get additional funding to enhance management of the area and deal with recreational abuses. People can contact Sen. Jeff Bingaman, chairman, Energy and Natural Resources Committee at 202-224-5521, and Rep. Raúl Grijalva, chairman, Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands at 202-225-2435, to request these bills be heard.

All of the time and money invested in the restoration of Fossil Creek will mean nothing if the creek is trashed by overuse, recreational abuse, human waste and litter. The creek's critical importance as a native fishery is yet to be fully realized despite adequate funding and agreement among biologists. We celebrate the return of full flows to Fossil Creek, but we must be ever vigilant in assuring that this resource is restored and protected fully.

*Michelle Harrington**Rivers Program Director,**Center for Biological Diversity**Phoenix, Arizona**On behalf of Arizona Riparian Council,**Arizona Wilderness Coalition, Arizona Wildlife Federation,**Center for Biological Diversity, Maricopa Audubon Society,**Northern Arizona Audubon Society,**and Sierra Club - Grand Canyon Chapter*To receive two free issues of High Country News call 1-800-905-1155, or visit: <http://www.hcn.org/freepapersubscription.jsp>

119 Grand Avenue  
PO Box 1090  
Paonia, CO 81428  
(970) 527-4898