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Groups present pipeline petitions to Upper Verde Coalition

By Les Stukenberg
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PRESCOTT - The Center for Biological Diversity and other groups presented the Upper Verde River Watershed Protection Coalition with more than 19,000 signatures Wednesday on petitions that call for a detailed mitigation plan before Prescott-area communities build any pipelines to the Big Chino aquifer.

Joining Joanne Oellers of the center were representatives of the Sierra Club, Paulden Area Community Organization and Citizens Water Advocacy Group.

They want the mitigation plan to detail how the municipalities will avoid damaging the Upper Verde River that originates near Paulden. Scientists generally agree that the Big Chino supplies at least 80 percent of the upper river's water during dry seasons.

"On behalf of future generations, we will not let this river die," said Leslie Hoy of the Citizens Water Advocacy Group, a Prescott-based citizens group.

Gary Beverly of the Sierra Club read a position statement endorsed by 20 organizations, then Allison Trowbridge read the petition before presenting them to coalition chair Karen Fann, who also is Chino Valley's mayor. Most of the signatures

were from people around the country and world who submitted them online. Oellers said about 1,000 were local signatures.

Oellers asked the coalition members to take the petitions to their respective councils for Prescott, Prescott Valley and Chino Valley, and she asked for responses from those governments.

Creagan McConnell of the Paulden group later asked the coalition to put the issue on its March agenda, but the coalition declined.

"The pipeline really isn't a coalition issue," Fann said.

"I agree this is not the forum to hash out the pipeline issue," Yavapai County Supervisor Carol Springer agreed.

The coalition shares the group's concerns about protecting the river, Prescott Valley Town Council Member Mike Flannery noted.

"That's why we formed this organization," Springer said.

Also at Monday's meeting, the coalition decided it needed to talk more about what members want from a \$52,000 groundwater recharge study before its consultant proceeds with it.

Springer questioned the need for all the elements of the study and the 20-week schedule, saying a lot of



Before the start of the Upper Verde River Watershed Protection Coalition meeting, members of the Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club and other groups coordinate how they will present 19,000 signatures on a petition asking for a comprehensive mitigation plan before Prescott-area communities build a water pipeline to the Big Chino aquifer.

research about effective rainwater capture methods already is available and the coalition is meant to be action oriented.

"We keep spending time and money, and we keep studying things that have been studied thousands of years," Springer said.

In other business, the coalition agreed to issue a request for proposals seeking grant request writers, and it made changes to an Arizona Department of Water Resources letter seeking information about long-term groundwater recharge statistics.