



The Daily Courier

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Dozens object to Prescott's assured water request to ADWR

By Cindy Barks

The Daily Courier

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

PRESCOTT - A flood of protests has swamped Prescott's effort to increase the amount of assured water available to the city.

The Arizona Department of Water Resources reported this week that dozens of individuals, governmental entities, and other groups have objected to the city's request to increase the amount of its assured water supply to reflect future importation from the Big Chino Basin.

Local officials say the protest count stood at 51 Wednesday, with the possibility of still more to come.

ADWR Assistant Director Sandy Fabritz-Whitney said the high number of protests is unusual. While the department annually processes three or four similar requests for water designations from around the state, Fabritz-Whitney said protests are relatively uncommon.

"We rarely get any," she said.

Among the objectors to the modification application that the city filed in October 2007 was local resident Leslie Hoy, who has long questioned Prescott and Prescott Valley's plans for importation of water from the Paulden-area Big Chino Basin.

While Hoy's main objections center on the impacts the pumping would have on the flow of the Verde River, she said she also voiced concerns in her protest about the financing for the pipeline, which city officials estimate at a cost of upwards of \$170 million.

"I actually don't understand how the city would be able to pay for the pipeline," Hoy said Wednesday. Local contractors, she said, "all want the pipeline, but they don't want to pay the impact fees."

Hoy was just one of about 40 individual objectors - many of whom used as its template a letter that the Center for Biological Diversity sent out earlier this month, urging people to voice their concerns.

Michelle Harrington, rivers conservation manager for the Center for Biological Diversity, agreed that a number of the objectors appeared to have used the sample letter that the center e-mailed out. Even so, she said, the level of interest is an indication that area residents are becoming more concerned about the prospect of the city's plans to build the 30-mile pipeline.

"All of this is really coming to a head," Harrington said. "It looks to me like the gauntlet has been thrown down. I think there should be a hearing."

Indeed, Fabritz-Whitney noted that a hearing is one of the possibilities that could come out of ADWR's review of the objections. She said the department has about 45 days to review the matter before coming to a decision on how to proceed. A hearing could come either before or after ADWR's director makes a decision on Prescott's application.

Meanwhile, officials from the two involved municipalities, Prescott and Prescott Valley, question the validity of many of the protests.

"A lot (of the objections) came from a form letter that people filled out and sent in," City Manager Steve Norwood said Wednesday.

And others came from cities and other governmental agencies from outside the Prescott Active Management area, which Prescott and Prescott Valley officials say makes them ineligible for participation in the process.

"A half-dozen or more really don't have standing, because they don't live in the AMA," Norwood said.

Along with the individuals, other objectors to Prescott's application include: Arizona Game and Fish; the City of Phoenix; the City of Tempe; the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation; the [Salt River Project](#); the Nature Conservancy; the Town of Camp Verde; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and the Yavapai Apache Tribe.

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