

## Water in the river, wolves in the woods

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Arizona Republic, Shaun McKinnon

A couple of updates:

When last we left the San Pedro River at Charleston Road outside Sierra Vista, it was about to dry up again. It didn't - the monsoon arrived just in time - but it was close.

On June 29, the U.S. Geological Survey gauge fell to 0.01 cubic feet per second, just a whisper of water, about 4.5 gallons a minute. The gauge hovered at that level or a bit above for a day or so, then started to pick up again as the first storms of the season hit the mountains.

Like most desert rivers, the San Pedro is flashy - one good storm and it gushes. On July 5 after a particularly good storm the river peaked at 123 cfs, just over 55,000 gallons a minute.

The Charleston gauge is considered a bellwether of the upper San Pedro's health because it sits in a reach where the bedrock is unusually close to the surface. That means if there's water in the system, it will probably reach the surface. In other stretches, the flow can sink into the ground.

When Charleston runs dry - and until last summer, it hadn't for at least 70 years - it means the river isn't getting water from its underground base flow and environmental groups who watch the San Pedro say that happens because of too much groundwater pumping elsewhere on the watershed.

According to Robin Silver, board chair for the Center for Biological Diversity, the groundwater deficit along the San Pedro - the difference between what's being pumped out and what recharges naturally or otherwise - has reached 8,300 acre-feet per year, or about 2.7 billion gallons.

Silver said last year's zero flow event should have been a wake-up call for leaders along the river, but instead, he points to continued development, including approval by Sierra Vista of more than 7,700 new homes.

Other state and local agencies have also ignored the San Pedro's deteriorating condition, Silver said, allowing development to proceed and risking the river, its habitat and the endangered species that live there.

## WOLVES IN THE WOODS

We told you about the planned release of a new wolf pack in the high country near Pinetop. The four wolves - an alpha male and female and two 12-week-old pups - were left in a temporary holding pen near Middle Mountain in the Apache National Forest.

According to the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the wolves chewed their way through the nylon mesh pen about five hours after they were placed in it on July 5. The wolves are now roaming free and appear to be doing well, said Shawn Farry, wolf project field team leader for the department.

The new pack joins nine other living in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area in Arizona and New Mexico.

State and federal agencies have been re-introducing the Mexican gray wolves in the recovery areas since the mid-1980s.