



MEMORANDUM

Date: May 23, 2019

To: The Honorable Chairman and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator 

Re: **Conservation Effluent Pool: Annual Summary**

In recognition of the severe threats to riparian areas from drought and other factors in the Southwestern United States and the historic losses of this ecosystem in the Tucson area, Pima County and the City of Tucson reserved in a Conservation Effluent Pool (Pool) up to 10,000 acre-feet of effluent per year. This water is set aside for use in riparian restoration projects.

An annual summary of activity of the Pool is required from staff under the Implementing Agreement adopted under Board Resolution 2010-302. This memorandum provides an update of the recent developments regarding use of the Pool.

Background

Use of effluent from the Pool is restricted to those entities identified in the 2001 Supplemental Agreement between City of Tucson and Pima County, including a number of local water providers and the Regional Flood Control District (RFCD). Until recently, no allocation requests had been made by eligible entities.

Use of the Pool would require a decision from the Pima County Board of Supervisors, as well as the City Mayor and Council, with the exception of ESA-related riparian projects, which are authorized upon submittal of the required evidence to the Administrators.

The Pool is available to any qualified entity to mitigate project effects under Section 7 or Section 10 of the Endangered Species Act, although such a connection with the Act is not required. In late 2017, the endangered Gila topminnow was detected in the Santa Cruz River effluent downstream of the Agua Nueva treatment facility. Additional surveys have confirmed that the river is being used by this endangered species.

Pima County's Effluent Generation Reports shows a trend of decreasing discharge from the Agua Nueva wastewater reclamation facility to the Santa Cruz River. The Living River flow monitoring shows flow seldom reaches Ina Road anymore, and we observed elimination of wetlands upstream of Ina prior to the documented arrival of the Gila topminnow in 2017.

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City of Tucson Submits First Application

In December 2018, City of Tucson became the first qualified entity to submit a formal request for evaluation by the Pool Administrators. The City requested to allocate portions of the Pool in amounts to cover the evapotranspiration losses in the two effluent-dependent reaches of the Santa Cruz River downstream of the metropolitan treatment facilities, as well as to the Heritage Project located upstream of Congress Street. All three of the projects were found to be characterized as designated riparian projects, in that none of them claimed any water from the Pool in relation to the mitigation for the Gila topminnow.

The County and City Administrators for the Pool evaluated the three applications in January 2019, and found all three to be incomplete relative to information required by [the application form](#) posted on the [County's webpage](#) for the Pool. The completeness review and application requirements are based on standards specified in the [intergovernmental agreement](#) for administration of the Pool. One type of information lacking on all proposals was to identify the "critical vegetation" that the Pool will sustain. Applications must also specify a water budget that is keyed to the water requirements of the habitat features that are part of the riparian project. These types of information ensure the Pool is used judiciously over time.

The City project manager has been informed that no further action will be taken until the information deficiencies identified have been addressed. City of Tucson reportedly intends to revise the Heritage Project application in order to qualify it for the Pool. Any resubmitted application will be reviewed by the County Pool Administrator Julia Fonseca and the City Pool Administrator Tim Thomure. If the application is found to be complete and it remains a Designated Riparian Project, then it will be scheduled for Board review and approval within 30 days of the Pool Administrator concurrence.

The first discharges from the [Santa Cruz Heritage Project](#) to the Santa Cruz River will use effluent owned by City of Tucson, not Pool water. Tucson Water will celebrate the release in conjunction with Dia de San Juan on June 24, 2019. For more details, see the project webpage at www.tucsonaz.gov/water/SCRHP .

Recommendations

The trend of decreasing effluent is likely to continue as water conservation further reduces sewage inflows and more water is diverted from Agua Nueva for other uses. Maintaining a level of continuous discharge of high-quality effluent flow to the river from the Agua Nueva facility is needed to support recreational and wildlife values. In light of this, Pima County will seek an allocation of the Pool to support the river downstream of Agua Nueva should the City of Tucson choose not to resubmit an application for the Pool in this reach.

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Pima County RFCD is evaluating river management for the Santa Cruz River Grant Road to Pinal County line. As part of that management plan, the District will consider other potential allocations of Pool water for the planning area.

c: Carmine DeBonis, Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
Suzanne Shields, Director, Regional Flood Control District
Jackson Jenkins, Director, Regional Wastewater Reclamation Department
Carla Blackwell, Director, Development Services
Linda Mayro, Director, Sustainability and Conservation
Julia Fonseca, Environmental Planning Manager, Sustainability and Conservation