

GOVERNMENT

EPA to Pay \$9.1M for Riverside County Superfund Site

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has agreed to pay \$9.1 million in cash and credits related to the 17-acre Stringfellow Superfund site in northwestern Riverside County, California, reported the *Riverside Press-Enterprise*. From 1956 to 1972, the Stringfellow acid pits received an estimated 34 million gallons of toxic industrial waste, primarily from metal finishing, electroplating, and pesticide production. It was deposited in unlined evaporation ponds at the site, where spray evaporation procedures were used to reduce the volume. Drainage from the pits as well as overflow and controlled releases following heavy rains resulted in contaminants, primarily volatile organic compounds and heavy metals, impacting nearby streams and eventually reaching the water table where it threatened private drinking water wells.

Allen Wolfenden, chief of the Stringfellow branch of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control, told the *Press-Enterprise* that responsibility for the ongoing cleanup has been under debate by EPA and the state of California for more than a decade. In 1982 the acid pits were declared a federal Superfund site, and from 1983 to 1996 EPA provided funds to California to pay for cleanup. However, according to the paper, "a federal district court in 1995 ruled that the state was liable for Stringfellow, in part because it authorized the site as a dump." Since that time, the two agencies have been disputing their respective financial obligations, leading to animosity between them, EPA attorney Andrew Helmlinger told the newspaper.

As a result, EPA's agreement in March was welcomed by both parties. Under its terms, EPA will pay \$2.2 million to the state and another \$2.2 million to fund ongoing studies to determine the extent

of groundwater contamination, reported the *Press-Enterprise*. The remaining \$4.7 million will be credited to EPA for its oversight of the state-led cleanup over the next 20 years. However, the paper noted, considerably more time and money may be needed before cleanup is complete.

Visit www.epa.gov/region09/cleanup/california.html and www.pe.com.

IRIS Status Update

The Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) is an EPA database that contains the agency's scientific positions on human health effects that may result from exposure to more than 500 chemical substances in the environment. An IRIS assessment is developed through a number of steps involving solicitation of scientific information on the substance, a literature search, development of the summary, and several levels of review, including by an external peer group. All assessments

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currently in progress and their status are listed on the IRIS website. In March, EPA announced the 2006 IRIS agenda; no new assessments will be initiated this year so that researchers can focus on completing the 76 assessments underway.

In an effort to improve the IRIS program, EPA has expanded its staff. In addition, external scientific peer reviews now are being conducted by panel meetings rather than by mail, and each is conducted at the end of each IRIS assessment review process in order to strengthen the role of peer review in informing the outcome of the process. A public comment period prior to panel peer review meetings is now standard practice, and the meetings are open to the public.

Visit www.epa.gov/iris/.

Navajo Nation Approved for Clean Water Programs

This spring, U.S. EPA granted the Navajo Nation the authority to administer federal Clean Water Act programs. The Navajo Nation is the 34th tribe of 563 nationwide to be approved to administer water-quality standards and a water-quality certification program under the Clean Water Act. The tribe will work with EPA to develop and adopt water quality standards which, once approved, will form the basis for water quality-based effluent limitations and other requirements for discharges to waters within the tribe's jurisdiction.

Visit www.epa.gov/owm/mab/indian/navajo.htm.

EPA's CADDIS Helps ID Contamination Sources

Earlier this year, EPA released a web-based tool, the Causal Analysis/Diagnosis Decision Information System (CADDIS), designed to simplify determining the cause of contamination in impaired rivers, streams, and estuaries that do not meet state or federal water quality standards for one or more pollutants.

CADDIS provides a standardized, easily accessible system to help scientists find, use, and share information to determine the causes of aquatic impairment.

Causal analyses look at the effect of a specific substance or activity (stressor) on the environment. Typical water stressors include excess fine sediments, nutrients, or toxic substances.

CADDIS was developed by EPA scientists through partnerships with EPA programs and regions, as well as states and tribes. Future versions will include modules to quantify stressor-response relationships, and databases and syntheses of relevant literature on sediments and toxic metals.

CADDIS is available at www.epa.gov/caddis/.

EPA Help for Small Systems

EPA has released two new documents and a suggested affordability approach for small water utilities trying to balance the demands for quality water with their financial ability to deliver it. The targeted systems serve 3,300 or fewer customers.

"Setting Small Drinking Water System Rates for a Sustainable Future" is designed to help owners and operators understand the full costs of providing drinking water of high quality and sufficient amount to their customers and to guide the utility in setting water rates that will support these costs.

The 62-page report can be downloaded from www.epa.gov/OGWDW/smallsys/pdfs/guide_smallsystems_final_ratesetting_guide.pdf.

"Case Studies of Sustainable Water and Wastewater Pricing" provides real-world examples of eight drinking-water systems and their approach to determining and establishing rates. Examples from the West include two-page summaries of systems in Greeley, Colorado, and Marin and San Jose, California.

The 25-page report is available at www.epa.gov/OGWDW/smallsys/pdfs/guide_smallsystems_fullcost_pricing_case_studies.pdf.

Enviros Sue Feds Over Grand Canyon Protection

In February, the Center for Biological Diversity, Arizona Wildlife Federation, Living Rivers, Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club, and Glen Canyon Institute filed suit in U.S. District Court in Arizona against then-Interior Secretary Gale Norton, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation on behalf of the humpback chub and the Grand Canyon (who could not themselves file for lack of penmanship skills and law degrees). For more than a decade, the groups said, Reclamation has been required to modify the operations of Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado River to reverse the dam's downstream impacts on Grand Canyon's river ecosystem. These efforts, they claim, have failed to produce results, thus the agencies are in violation of the Grand Canyon Protection Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Grand Canyon Protection Act was passed in 1992 to reverse the demise of the canyon and the decline of endangered native fish species. Following the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement three years later, the Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program was established to guide Reclamation in implementing recovery guidelines set forth by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Modified Low Fluctuating Flow Alternative is the operational scheme enacted in the Adaptive Management Program that called for released flood-flow events with the hope of improving habitat and restoring native fish populations. But in October 2005, the U.S. Geological Survey released its evaluation of this program in a 220-page report, "The State of the Colorado River Ecosystem in Grand Canyon," confirming that recovery of the humpback chub is not being achieved.

According to the Center for Biological Diversity, the lawsuit aims to protect

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the native fish and aquatic habitat of the Grand Canyon and Colorado River by stopping the ongoing destruction caused by the current operations of Glen Canyon Dam, but it does not seek to decommission the dam.

The lawsuit can be viewed at www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/press/grand-canyon-complaint2-15-2006.pdf.

Fort Huachuca to Revisit San Pedro River Impacts

from the Center for Biological Diversity

In March, the U.S. Army's Fort Huachuca announced that it would revisit its obligations to protect southern Arizona's San Pedro River and will reinstate consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), a nonprofit conservation organization, had filed a lawsuit against the fort in June 2005 for the Army's failure to consult on impacts to the river and endangered species resulting from new military missions and population increases in the region owing to the fort's presence.

In the 2002 Biological Opinion (BO) issued by FWS, the fort was charged with mitigating the overdraft groundwater use in the Upper San Pedro River/Sierra Vista subwatershed. The fort also agreed to not expand by more than 500 people

through 2011. Since that time, the fort has added or committed to adding more than 2,500 people. With the addition of those troops, their families, contractors, and others, CBD estimates the overall population increase using standard multipliers would be nearly 12,000.

According to CBD, new information has become available that also triggers the need for reinitiating consultation: recent estimates of the groundwater deficit are double the amount estimated in the 2002 BO; groundwater pumping for the fort and the city of Sierra Vista has been found to intercept water that would otherwise contribute to the baseflow of the river; the San Pedro went dry for the first time on record last year; and surviving locations of the endangered Huachuca water umbel, a plant that relies on the perennial flow of the San Pedro, have subsequently been reduced.

Visit www.biologicaldiversity.org.

CA Agencies Ordered to Comply

In February, the California State Water Resources Control Board imposed a cease-and-desist order against the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for the threatened violation of their permit and license conditions, which requires compliance with salinity objectives in

the interior southern Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The board concluded that DWR and Reclamation are responsible for meeting the salinity objective in that area of 0.7 millimhos per centimeter electrical conductivity at specified compliance stations between April 1 and Aug. 31 each year. Further, the agencies must comply with a detailed plan and schedule to bring them into compliance by July 1, 2009, and report potential violations and take corrective action to prevent them.

To meet the goals, the agencies, which operate the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project, might have to pump less water out of the delta, which would impact millions of water users in the Central Valley and southern parts of the state, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Other options include releasing more water from upstream reservoirs to dilute the salinity in the delta, and improving flow within the delta.

Liz Kanter, spokesperson for the water board, called the action "historic" for its hard-line approach, reported the *Times*. Representatives from the affected agencies were not so enthusiastic, saying they were being held accountable for pollution for which they were not responsible, said the newspaper. Jerry Johns, deputy director of DWR, said reducing water exports would not improve water quality because the salinity is introduced by local discharges.

Visit www.waterboards.ca.gov and www.latimes.com.

HydroFacts

Scant precipitation in winter and spring in Arizona, New Mexico, west Texas, and southwestern Colorado has people looking forward to rain from the North American monsoon, which typically begins between July 3 and July 8 and affects only this region of the United States. Above-average water temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico are causing some to speculate that this year's monsoon could be a wet one. The monsoon contributes a significant percentage of annual precipitation in the area.

City	July-Sept. avg. monsoon precip. (inches)	Avg. yearly precip. (inches)	% yearly precip in monsoon months
Albuquerque, NM	3.8	8.6	44
El Paso, TX	4.5	8.6	52
Flagstaff, AZ	7.3	21.6	34
Phoenix, AZ	2.8	7.7	36
Tucson, AZ	5.8	12.2	48

Source: National Weather Service

Lawsuit vs. All-American Canal Lining Dismissed Temporarily

A lawsuit to block the lining of a 23-mile section of the All-American Canal that was filed by two California environmental groups and a Mexicali economic development council was dealt a major blow in February, with U.S. District Judge Philip Pro dismissing all but one of eight counts in the lawsuit, reported the Colorado River Board of California. The Imperial Irrigation District is planning to recoup about 67,000 acre-feet per year

of water now lost to seepage through the canal—water that the plaintiffs argued served economic and agricultural interests in Mexico. The states of California, Arizona, and Nevada had all filed motions to completely dismiss the lawsuit, but the judge allowed one count, related to alleged violations of the National Environmental Policy Act and the federal Administrative Procedures Act, to stand. In March, the plaintiffs were allowed to file an amended complaint, reasserting the original eight counts as a class action suit.

Visit www.crb.ca.gov.

CA Boards Collaborate on Air-to-Water Pollution

Pollutants as varied as brake pad particles from traffic jams to dust from dirt roads were the focus of a historic joint meeting of California's State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and the state's Air Resources Board (ARB) in February. The meeting was intended to initiate coordination in the investigation of aerial deposition of toxic contaminants from air to land, from where they are swept up in runoff and end up as water pollutants.

SWRCB Vice Chair Jerry Secundy will lead future efforts to coordinate his agency's activities with the ARB. Working groups are being formed that will bring together other environmental regulators and stakeholders to address the priority issues of inventorying the original sources of various pollutants and developing an action plan to deal with them at the source.

Specific findings mentioned at the meeting, reported by SWRCB, include:

- Southern California faces water pollution that begins as air pollution from jet and diesel fuels, dust from paved and unpaved roads, tire wear, and construction projects.
- 27 kilograms of mercury are deposited annually in the San Francisco Bay directly from the air. Another 160 kg (much of which begins as air pollution) enters as urban runoff. This is balanced

by 190 kg of mercury that is transferred from the bay into the air (a relatively small amount compared to an estimated annual 1,220 kg of mercury entering the bay).

- In the Lake Tahoe area, traffic-generated air pollution varies by time of day, as do air currents and the transfer of pollution from the air to the lake.

www.waterboards.ca.gov and www.arb.ca.gov.

NMED Funds Operator Training

The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) is working to meet a statewide need for certified drinking water system operators in small, rural communities by providing funding for expenses associated with training required under state and federal regulations.

New Mexico has about 1,280 public water systems statewide, more than 95 percent of which serve fewer than 500 consumers. Due to large travel distances, low population densities and economic barriers, many small, rural public water systems have in the past had difficulties hiring certified operators.

Through an Expense Reimbursement Grant program administered by EPA, NMED is now offering training for operators of public water systems serving less than 3,300 consumers. Approximately 737 water systems are eligible. The EPA grant totals \$1.4 million, and the program ends Jan. 1, 2008.

Information on the grant program and training schedule is available at www.nmrwa.org/training.php or by calling 800-819-9893.

Metals Contamination in NM Wells

In March, the *Gallup Independent* reported that testing by the New Mexico Environment Department and U.S. EPA in September 2005 revealed contamination by metals and other regulated substances in 33 of 34 residential wells sampled in a western New Mexico community,

six of which are primary drinking water sources. Twenty-one of the wells had concentrations of uranium exceeding EPA's maximum contaminant level (MCL) of 30 micrograms per liter. Selenium, lead, and nitrate were also found at levels exceeding MCLs in several wells; sulfate, total dissolved solids, iron, chloride, and manganese were found at concentrations exceeding secondary standards in most wells, said the article.

Homestake Mine, located in nearby Grants, New Mexico, is considered a possible source of the contamination, but insufficient data exist to differentiate between the impacts of that mine, other nearby uranium operations, and background conditions, according to the *Independent*. The federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, attempting to determine the long-term dose residents have been exposed to, is searching for historic water quality analyses and consumption rates to supplement the recent sampling event. Results of the agency's study are needed before an alternative water supply is merited, said the paper.

Many residents are anxious for a new supply. *Wise-uranium.org* reported that in 2001, Homestake had requested from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission a relaxation of groundwater standards for the uranium mill tailings site, claiming that current site standards for uranium, selenium, and molybdenum were lower than the 95 percent background levels. In September 2004, 26 residents served the mining company with a complaint seeking damages over injuries they alleged resulted from exposure to that mine's wastes, according to the website. In October 2005, residents claimed the background samples Homestake was citing as justification for more relaxed standards were obtained from an area already impacted by other mines. None of these issues have yet been resolved.

Visit www.gallupindependent.com and www.wise-uranium.org.