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Agencies affirm their commitment to address water and ecological conservation near the San Pedro River in Southeast Arizona

SIERRA VISTA, Ariz. – The Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) Gila District, U.S. Army Garrison Fort Huachuca, Cochise County, and City of Sierra Vista affirmed their commitment to water and ecological conservation of the San Pedro River and Sierra Vista subwatershed area by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for cooperative monitoring and management of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA) and surrounding areas within Cochise County.

The MOU provides a proposed path to ensure the achievement of mutually shared goals of an ecologically viable SPRNCA and regional water security, including:

- A healthy San Pedro River and ecologically viable SPRNCA.
- Adequate long-term water supplies to maintain the needs of the area’s residents and property owners, as well as the SPRNCA.
- More opportunities for continued economic growth and development within Cochise County.
- An operationally secure Fort Huachuca that can accomplish its national defense missions, have a safe and adequate water supply, and comply with all obligations under the Endangered Species Act.

The MOU reaffirms the alliance and commitment between the four partners on how to best collaborate to ensure a healthy, ecologically viable SPRNCA, San Pedro River and regional aquifer. The terms of the MOU detail the partners’ collaborative approach to evaluating and implementing terms of an adaptive management plan (“Plan”) aimed to conserve the desert riparian ecosystem of the SPRNCA while aiding the continued economic growth and development of Cochise County. The Plan will implement monitoring and management actions necessary from all partners involved to ensure the conservation and economic prosperity of the area.

“Given the challenging breadth and depth of its mission, the BLM can only succeed through strong relationships with local communities and collaborative efforts such as this,” says BLM Gila District Manager Scott Feldhausen. “With a changing climate and the extended drought, we

are facing here in the Southwest, such collaboration is more necessary than ever before. “Congress established the SPRNCA in 1988, as the nation's first riparian national conservation area,” Feldhausen added. “It is therefore fitting that this unique place be the first to have a collaborative, science-based process to guide management efforts to ensure the river meets the needs of the local communities and the plethora of species that call this river home, as Congress intended.”

The MOU for Cooperative Monitoring and Management of the SPRNCA is an important step forward in promoting greater cooperation among local and federal government. The MOU reflects the commitment of the partners’ enthusiasm to work together in good faith to implement an impactful plan. The plan outlines a clear, cooperative process for all involved to recognize their mutual efforts, assess their collective progress, and to re-evaluate and adjust goals as efforts move forward.

“Cochise County has worked on various projects for many years to help conserve and improve the health of the riparian habitat within the County,” says Ann English, Cochise County Supervisor and Chairman. “It’s important to work together and cooperate with other agencies to successfully achieve common goals,” English added. “This agreement is an example of a shared interest between partners in conserving the beauty and utility of natural resources of the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area for the public to enjoy for the years to come.”

“The U.S. Army at Fort Huachuca has been protecting the land it defends since 1877,” said Garrison Commander Col. Jarrod Moreland. “We look forward to building on a long history of environmental conservation and stewardship within the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area. The signing of this agreement formally outlines the partners’ collaborative efforts and commitment to the conservation, ecological health and viability of the local area. These shared goals lay the groundwork in ensuring Fort Huachuca’s ability to meet its national defense missions.”

“The City of Sierra Vista is a proud partner in this effort to sustain and protect the San Pedro River, the regional aquifer, and the San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area,” says Sierra Vista City Manager Chuck Potucek. “As the first city in the nation to be named a WaterSense Community by the Environmental Protection Agency, Sierra Vista has been making strategic policy decisions and working in-step with local partners for decades to responsibly manage local water resources. This agreement builds upon these long-standing efforts, and we greatly appreciate the opportunity to work together to achieve common goals that benefit both the river and our community.”

“The Nature Conservancy applauds the collaborative, science-based approach that is the foundation of this historic agreement,” says Dan Stellar, state director for The Nature Conservancy in Arizona. “As megadrought conditions not only continue- but worsen- throughout the western States, it’s more important than ever to inform water management with strong

science, and to leverage limited resources among partners toward innovation and solutions that benefit all.”

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About the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area (SPRNCA)

The BLM has managed the SPRNCA since its establishment in 1988. The primary purpose for the establishment of the SPRNCA was to protect and enhance one of the most important riparian areas in the United States. In 2019, a Resource Management Plan was completed, which outlined goals and objectives that guide the BLM in its management obligations to conserve, protect and enhance the SPRNCA.

This year, we invite everyone to reimagine your public lands as we celebrate 75 years of the BLM’s stewardship and service to the American people. The BLM manages approximately 245 million acres of public land located primarily in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The agency’s mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America’s public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

About Fort Huachuca

Fort Huachuca is home to the U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence, the U.S. Army Network Enterprise Technology Command (NETCOM)/9th Army Signal Command and more than 48 supported tenants representing a diverse, multiservice population. Our unique environment encompasses 964 square miles of restricted airspace and 2,500 square miles of protected electronic ranges, key components to the national defense mission.

Located in Cochise County, in southeast Arizona, about 15 miles north of the border with Mexico, Fort Huachuca is an Army installation with a rich frontier history. Established in 1877, the Fort was declared a national landmark in 1976.

We are the Army’s Home. Learn more at <https://home.army.mil/huachuca/>

About Cochise County

Cochise County provides regional leadership and effective, high-quality services with personal and professional integrity. Located in the southeast corner of Arizona, Cochise County has natural beauty, world famous history, and a fascinating culture. Covering 6,219 square miles, and with a population of approximately 130,000 people, the County provides vital services to the unincorporated areas of the region. It is home to a diverse range of incorporated cities, including Sierra Vista, Bisbee, Benson, Douglas, Tombstone, Willcox, and Huachuca City. For more information, visit www.cochise.az.gov, facebook.com/CochiseCountyAZ or twitter.com/CochiseCounty.

About City of Sierra Vista, AZ

Founded in 1956, the City of Sierra Vista is the commercial, education, and medical hub of Southeast Arizona. With forward-thinking, citizen-centric leadership, the City strives to provide a safe, healthy, and thriving community. As an organization, the City holds high standards for environmental stewardship, transparency, and fiscal management, ensuring that Sierra Vista will always be an extraordinary place to live, work, and enjoy. For more information, please visit: sierravistaaz.gov.

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