

Feb. 18, 1985 Scottsdale (Ariz.) Daily Progress

Rio Salado hearing set at Capitol

PHOENIX (AP) — Maricopa County residents will be asked this week if they want to pay higher taxes to fund the massive Rio Salado project labeled by some a developer's dream.

House Majority Leader Burton Barr is betting the answer will be yes; environmentalists say the answer is no. The only sure bet is that a final decision is a long way off.

Rio Salado is a plan to develop 5,000 acres of homes, offices, parks and resort hotels in the Salt River bed from Mesa to 43rd Avenue in southwestern Phoenix.

The \$1 billion scheme will eventually pay for itself, backers say, but in the meantime they want county residents to provide up to \$100 million in property taxes.

The first public hearing on the project would be held in Phoenix next week. Developers would hold a public hearing in Mesa next week down with a bank full of

Herb Fibel, president of the Maricopa County Audubon Society, said one environmental concern was that the Cliff Dam would flood a bald eagle nest and wipe out other wildlife habitat along the Verde River.

In addition, Fibel said, it is foolhardy to move homes and businesses into the Salt River bed even with the upstream dams. A home built within the 200-year floodplain would stand a 1-in-8 chance of being flooded over 25 years, he said.

Others who may have something to say about the project are the 300 to 400 families now living in the targeted area, many of them blacks and Hispanics. They would be offered either a new home within the project area, an existing home somewhere else, or a cash payment of their home's replacement value.

Arizona Republic, Sept. 7, 1984

Rio Salado Project Invites Catastrophe

Editor:

Responding to a recent letter from Rich Johnson, executive director of the Central Arizona Project Association, the Maricopa Audubon Society is in favor of making dams safe.

Roosevelt Dam and Stewart Mountain Dam are the dams in our Salt and Verde system that have been recognized as unsafe.

All a person has to do is to look at a map to see that both of these dams are located on the Salt River.

It is only bureaucratic logic that can reach the conclusion that some \$120 million out of some \$650 million allocated by Congress for the purpose of making many dams safe throughout the United States should be used to partially fund a dam on the Verde known as Cliff Dam based upon an assessment that two dams on the Salt are unsafe!

We do not oppose federal dam-safety money being used to make Stewart Mountain Dam and Roosevelt Dam safe.

If anyone should be blamed in the event of a catastrophe, it is the Rio Salado Development District and its proponents.

They propose putting the homes of some 36,000 people and millions of dollars in commercial and industrial structures into an historic floodplain while relying upon the integrity of the Salt River and Verde River dams.

They rely as well on a crapshoot; that is, on the laws of probability, those laws that give planners of this type of project assurances that it will be 200 years before we have another 200-year flood, when each year that comes along has the capability of being the 200th year.

A 200-year flood, even with all of the dams in the Salt and Verde River system "made safe" and Cliff Dam in place, would still have catastrophic results on the Rio Salado Development.

HERBERT S. FIBEL
President
Maricopa Audubon Society
Tempe

Letters

The Phoenix Gazette

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1985

'Pie in the sky'

Editor:

Planners say they hope to "capture" 5-10 percent of this inevitable Valley growth and lure high-tech industry down into the Salt River floodplain. Since this growth will occur with or without the Rio Salado, the project does not represent any net gain in growth to Arizona.

Rio Salado and the two proposed upstream dams which would supposedly protect it would cost taxpayers \$1.6 billion. Any private developer given that much money could attract a far larger share of our Valley's inevitable growth.

Ample, far less costly land exists elsewhere in the Valley which does not require Rio Salado's huge costs of acquiring the entire river bed, relocating power lines and the gravel industry, recontouring the riverbottom, and cleaning up the hazardous landfills.

Planners say that after the upstream dams are built, 2,071 acres of "new" land will be reclaimed which was previously vacant land deep in the floodplain.

Upon this they propose to place 900 acres of industrial development, 100 acres of resort hotels, and 700 acres of residential development. This questionably safe, reclaimed river-bottom land will have cost the taxpayers the absurd price of \$800,000 per acre.

What the project would do is use public money to entice private development away from other portions of Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa and compete to an even greater extent with development in Scottsdale, Glendale, Chandler, Peoria, etc.

These regions and the private developers in them would be unfairly disadvantaged by the taxpayer-funded Rio Salado.

Private enterprise, not massive infusions of public tax dollars, was able to provide places like the McCormick Ranch, Fountain Hills, Tempe Lakes, Leisure World and Sun City.

MAS Past-President Clemens Titzck
Phoenix



Photo by Jim Gund

Herb Fibel, Maricopa Audubon Society president searches for questions from the media at today's news conference at the Phoenix Press Club.

The Chandler Arizonan, Friday, September 20, 1985

Environmentalists file suit to force alternatives to Cliff Dam project

By Sunny Weathers
Staff writer

A lawsuit to stop Cliff Dam was filed in U.S. District Court in Phoenix Thursday by a group of environmentalists.

The suit asks for an injunction against all of Plan 6 until the Bureau of Reclamation reopens the environmental review process.

The \$1.1 billion Plan 6 is the final portion of the Central Arizona Project and includes construction of Cliff Dam on the Verde River, New Waddell Dam on the Agua Fria River and reconstruction work on two other dams.

"We want Congress to know Arizona is not united with a desire to go forward with Plan 6, particularly Cliff Dam," said Herb Fibel, president of the Maricopa Audubon Society at a press conference Thursday.

The suit asks for a reexamination of alternatives to Plan 6, particularly those that don't include Cliff Dam.

A bald eagle's nesting site will be flooded when Cliff dam is built on the Verde River between Horseshoe and Bartlett dams. Environmentalists have said other bald eagle nesting areas could be affected. Twenty pairs of the endangered species are known to nest in Arizona.

At the press conference, Fibel and representatives of other environmental groups involved in the suit enumerated their charges against Cliff Dam.

The suit was filed by Phoenix lawyer Gilbert Venable on behalf of the National, Maricopa and Prescott Audubon Societies; the National and Arizona Wildlife Federations; the Sierra Club; Friends of the River; the Environmental Policy Institute; American Rivers Conservation Council; the National Parks and

Conservation Association; the Wilderness Society; and Friends of the Earth.

The dam is environmentally damaging and will provide nothing other than a reduced flood plain that will allow development of the Rio Salado Project, Fibel said.

He and others complained that riverside habitat in Arizona's desert has been decimated since the turn of the century. Cliff Dam would destroy more river habitat, they said.

Pat Willis, vice president of the Arizona Wildlife Federation, said the increased real estate value of undeveloped Salt River bottom accounts for almost half the economic benefits claimed for Cliff Dam by the Bureau of Reclamation.

"Water storage, flood control and improvement in the safety of existing dams, all benefits claimed (for Cliff) by the Bureau, can be achieved without constructing Cliff and at least overall cost to the Treasury," Willis said.

Cliff Dam would increase the renewable water supply of Plan 6 by 10 percent, Willis said.

Plan 6 was chosen as an alternative to Orme Dam, which was planned for the confluence of the Salt and Verde Rivers. Orme was scrubbed by President Jimmy Carter in 1977. Environmentalists said Orme would endanger Arizona's bald eagle population and the Fort McDowell Indians charged it would flood their reservation and burial grounds.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently cleared the way for Cliff Dam with a favorable biological impact statement. While acknowledging the damage by Cliff Dam to the eagle population, Fish and Wildlife said

Please turn to Dam, A2

Environmental groups sue in bid to block Cliff Dam

By MARY A.M. GINDHART
Arizona Republic Staff

A coalition of 12 national and state environmental groups filed suit in federal court Thursday to block plans for the construction of Cliff Dam and other dam projects in the Central Arizona Project's \$1.7 billion Plan 6.

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Phoenix, claims that the federal government violated the National Environmental Procedures Act in developing Plan 6 and demands that the government find an alternative to Cliff.

Plan 6 was chosen by the U.S.

Department of Interior from among nine alternatives to replace the planned Orme Dam and provide storage for CAP water and flood control along the Salt River in metropolitan Phoenix. Orme was killed in 1977 because of the objections by environmental groups and Indian tribes.

The environmental groups object to Cliff, which is proposed for the Verde River east of Phoenix, because the dam's reservoir would destroy at least six miles of scenic river and flood a habitat for desert-nesting bald eagles.

"Building Cliff would be like

placing a bomb along the river," said Charles Babbitt, vice president of the Maricopa Audubon Society and brother of Gov. Bruce Babbitt. "The cost of its destruction is just too high."

Bob Walsh, a spokesman for the federal Bureau of Reclamation's CAP office in Phoenix, said the bureau followed the rules of the National Environmental Procedures Act in selecting Plan 6 as the alternative to Orme Dam in 1983.

William Wheeler, president of the Central Arizona Project Association, said, "We're not going to lie down and play dead on this. We

have a good case."

Wheeler's group supports the project.

The \$3.6 billion CAP is expected to begin regular delivery of Colorado River water to Phoenix this year and to Tucson by 1991.

The environmental groups repeatedly had threatened to file suit over Cliff Dam if Arizona political leaders refused to drop the dam from Plan 6. A blue-ribbon panel headed by the governor, however, recommended the construction of \$385 million Cliff as part of a local-funding proposal for Plan 6.

The panel proposed last month

that the state pay up to \$327 million to secure a commitment from the federal government to push to complete the \$3.6 billion CAP, including Plan 6, by 1998.

That proposal, however, has come under fire in Congress because it assumes that Cliff, which would eliminate the need for safety repairs to two existing dams on the Verde, would be built with the help of federal dam-safety funds.

The environmental groups claim that the bureau and its parent agency, the Interior Department, violated the law by not including in

— Cliff, B7

Continued from B1

a draft report for public comment at least one Orme alternative that did not include Cliff.

The draft report prepared by the bureau included Plan 6 and seven other alternatives, all of which included Cliff Dam. A Plan 9, or Plan 6 without Cliff Dam, was included in the final environmental assessment issued by the bureau.

Walsh said that Plan 9 was presented the final report "as a direct result of the public comments during the process after the draft (report)."

The suit's defendants are Interior Secretary Donald Hodel; Cliff Bar-

rett, acting commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation; Ed Hallenbeck, acting regional director of the bureau's office in Boulder City, Nev.; and Larry Morton, director of the bureau's CAP office.

The environmental groups bringing the lawsuit, in addition to the Maricopa Audubon Society, are the National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Arizona Wildlife Federation, Prescott Audubon Society, Environmental Policy Institute, Friends of the River, Wilderness Society, Friends of the Earth, American Rivers Conservation Council and National Parks and Conservation Association.

Subsidizing Arizona's growth

To the editor: Even though many farmers are going bankrupt nationwide, only nine did here in Arizona last year. Farmers in Arizona are rolling in profits, thanks to the federal water project dollars which your state's congressmen keep sending us.

Your taxes are now building our Central Arizona Project to "rescue" our cities and agriculture from alleged drought. This project brings an average water subsidy of \$1,833.00 to each farmer.

Last year Arizona's 1,600 farmers who received federal deficiency payments averaged \$29,348 each, compared to the national average of \$5,000 per farmer. 73 percent of central Arizona's farmlands grow surplus crops which the fed pays farmers not to grow.

Your taxes keep providing giveaway-priced U.S. Bureau of Reclamation water so we can grow the same crops which are grown elsewhere in abundance. There is a common misconception that most of Arizona's crops are vegetables and citrus. In fact, 85 percent of our croplands are wheat, feed grains, forage and cotton. With these subsidies we compete unfairly against midwestern farmers. We have already put most of the South's cotton farmers out of business.

Every year our subsidy-hunting Arizona congressmen say our cities and farms are about to dry up and blow away. In fact, Arizona has plenty of water for all foreseeable growth. A book just published, "How to Create a Water Crisis" by Frank Welsh, exposes Arizona's congressional game. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is the ultimate mechanism for transferring subsidies from the East, Midwest and South to the West. It is not by accident that Arizona is one of the fastest-growing states and receives many more federal dollars than its citizens pay.

Arizona congressmen incorrectly claim that Reclamation farmers repay project costs. That's not even half true. Reclamation's interest-free terms with 50 years to pay dumps 80 percent of the bill on the federal taxpayer, leaving a mere 20 percent for the irrigators. In Arizona that 20 percent is further reduced by federal hydro-power subsidies from dams you helped build. Though the Bureau of Reclamation was founded under a 1902 homestead law to develop the arid West, the West is now developed and homesteading is a thing of the past.

We show our gratitude for your dollars by putting your farmers out of business and then enticing you to live in our water-wasting cities with their subsidized, underpriced water.

This fall we will ask Congress for more millions for huge dams to make possible a posh floodplain real estate development of condos, luxury hotels, industrial parks, lakes and golf courses in the desert riverbed that runs through Phoenix. With your taxes one of the richest, fastest-growing cities in the nation will use this extravaganza to entice industry and high-tech business away from your state. Our developers will arrogantly place the businesses and homes of unwitting newcomers deep inside a floodplain which flows in wet years.

Our congressmen will be telling you that the dams are desperately needed for flood control and dam safety. That blarney is as credible as the need to build an ocean liner to cross the Mississippi.

Will your congressmen once again vote to subsidize our growth with your tax dollars?

HERB FIBEL

Phoenix, Ariz.

(The author is president of the Maricopa Audubon Society in Phoenix.)

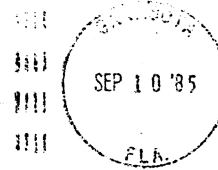


**letters
to the editor**

This will make you chuckle. His paper received Herb Fibel's op-ed

Sarasota Herald-Tribune

POSTAL DRAWER 1719, SARASOTA, FL 33578



Help to Arizona Is 'Appreciated'

Knowing you will be pleased to learn how your taxes have helped make a better life for your deserving countrymen, I want to tell you about a letter from Herb Fibel.

He lives in Phoenix, Arizona, where he is president of the local Audubon Society. He has written to editors around the country to ask them to thank their readers, and especially their congressmen, for their contributions to the prosperity of Arizona farmers and developers.

Fibel wants you to know that it is only because of the generosity of taxpayers like you that Arizona farmers are rolling in profits. Only nine Arizona farmers went bankrupt last year - one of the worst years of this century for agriculture, a year when Midwestern farmers were being driven out of business by the thousands.

Arizona farmers are doing so well thanks to a multitude of favors from all of us taxpayers. The most recent instance of our largesse is the ongoing Central Arizona Project which brings an average subsidy of \$1,833,000 to each farmer in the affected region. The subsidy comes in the form of cheap water supplied by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation at the behest of a generous Congress.

Making such a charitable spirit even more remarkable in this materialistic age is the fact that most Arizona farmers grow crops already in overabundance in other parts of the country.

"Seventy-three percent of central Arizona's farmlands grow surplus crops which the (federal government) pays farmers not to grow," Fibel says. "There is a common

Waldo Proffitt



you buy water for desert

misconception that most of Arizona's crops are vegetables and citrus. In fact 85 percent of our croplands are wheat, feed grains, forage and cotton. We have already put most of the South's cotton farmers out of business."

Fibel points out the Bureau of Reclamation was founded under a 1902 homestead law to develop the arid West. Even though the West is well developed and homesteading a thing of the past, the Bureau of Reclamation continues to move money to the West from the East, Midwest and South.

In Arizona, at least, they realize what is happening and they are grateful for your tax dollars. It would be terribly disheartening to think we were sending all that money out there and nobody even appreciated it.

And, one good turn deserves another. So, the burghers of Phoenix are asking Congress for more money to build more dams to make possible a posh floodplain development of condominiums, luxury hotels, lakes, golf courses and industrial parks in the normally dry river bed that runs through the city. They will use the industrial park, the lakes and the golf courses to try to woo high-tech industry from New York, Massachusetts,

New Jersey, and other states. Maybe even Florida.

If there is something about this that strikes you as a bit unfair, you are not alone. It is a little strong even for some residents of Arizona, Herb Fibel being one.

Congress, too, has been getting less and less willing to go along with water projects. It hasn't been as tough on them as it should, but its record is a lot better than it used to be.

The truth is that dams and canals to store and move water are the essence of the great congressional sport of pork-barreling. They are so deeply imbedded in the congressional habit pattern that they are more a tradition than an appropriation. Congress seems to need a "water fix" at least once a year. It's an expensive addiction. Expensive for the taxpayers.

There have been some hopeful signs in the last few years. More and more congressmen talk about quitting. But, every year, something seems to get in the way. "Just this one project," somebody says. So they go for one, and then two, and it's the same old story over and over.

The only way to quit is cold turkey. You know that. Congress knows that. Arizona knows that. So do California and Nevada and all those other rock-ribbed conservative states which don't want Washington to give out food stamps or medicine or any thing except water. They are out there pushing the time-tested line that the poor, arid West is about to dry up and blow away and the only thing that can save it is a steady flow of money.

We will probably send it along.

NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION
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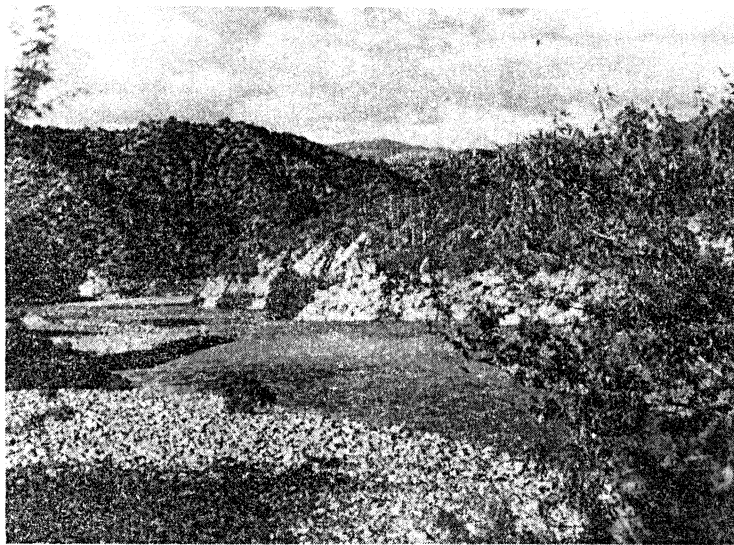
THE LEADER

VOL. 6 NO. 12 PUBLISHED FOR ITS AFFILIATE LEADERS BY THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION DECEMBER 1985

Desert River Dam

The Arizona Wildlife Federation (AWF) and NWF in September filed a suit in federal district court in Arizona to stop construction of a dam on the Verde River north of Phoenix.

AWF, NWF and several other conservation groups are challenging the proposal, charging that an incomplete environmental impact statement was prepared. The facility, part of the larger Central Arizona Project, would inundate valuable habitat for the rare desert-nesting bald eagle, among other species. A hearing before the court has not been scheduled.



DESERT OASIS: The Verde River's riparian habitat, critical for the rare desert-nesting bald eagle and other birds and wildlife, would be flooded if plans are authorized to build a dam on the Verde north of Phoenix.

A-221

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 1985

The Phoenix Gazette

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"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty," II Corinthians 3:17

Eagles & Cliff Dam

Editor:

A letter to the editor from Webb Todd of the Central Arizona Project Association supporting Cliff Dam contained some misleading and incorrect statements regarding Arizona's bald eagles. In his letter, Todd stated: "An eagle's nest which was discovered in the (Cliff Dam) area last year . . . has since been vacated."

In Arizona, the bald eagle nesting season starts in December or January and ends in late May or early June. In 1984, the nestlings at the Cliff Dam site died at about 9 weeks of age. In 1985, two eaglets fledged from that nest on June 6 and 7.

The comment that the nest has been vacated would imply that some sort of abandonment occurred. Not so. Every year an eagle's nest is vacated until the next nesting season. Arizona's eagles return with great regularity to their territories each year.

Todd's letter also stated that Arizona-banded eagles have been found in Canada and Mexico and that the eagles seem perfectly capable of adapting to modifications (Cliff Dam) in their environment. Not so. It's not at all uncommon for young eagles to wander great distances. The point is that these eagles, by the time they reach maturity at about age five, return aided by an uncanny homing ability to within a few miles of their birthplace.

Arizona's eagles nest along our few remaining Sonoran Desert streams, and they have largely been dammed or diverted. Only 13 pairs of this highly endangered population produced young this year. Our desert reservoirs are heavily trafficked, vegetationally sterile and have fluctuating water levels. They fail to supply the critical nesting and feeding requirements afforded by our peaceful, clear Sonoran Desert streams.

Other statements in Todd's letter regarding the dam are equally misleading. To say the dam creates water for 100,000 people is nonsense. According to the Rio Salado Master Plan, more water will be needed for the project's ornamental lakes and Bermuda grass berm than the total amount of water impounded by Cliff Dam. As for the alleged flood control benefits of which he speaks, they are all but nonexistent now that we have built 15 flood-proof bridges, channeled the airport and diked and relocated the downstream communities.

Charles J. Babbitt
Vice President
Maricopa Audubon Society
Phoenix

NAS says NEPA is an extremely important law. Without it Cliff Dam would have been built. NAS says "NEPA is the most important U.S. law most have never heard of."

AUDUBON ACTION

VOLUME 3 NUMBER 6

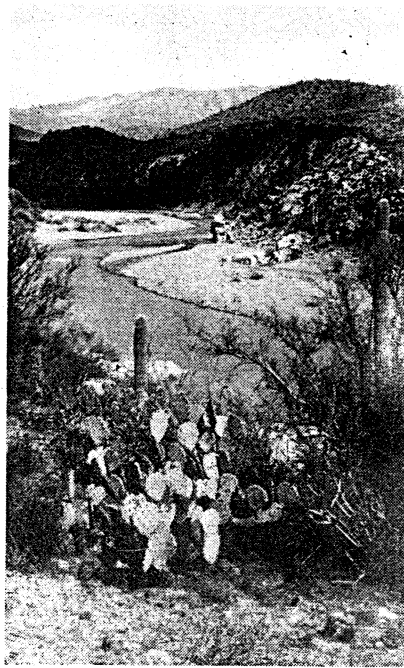
DECEMBER 1985

Arizona Dam Project Faces New Challenge

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY, together with a coalition of Arizona and national conservation organizations, filed suit in September to stop the proposed Cliff Dam on the Verde River northeast of Phoenix—a dam that threatens to destroy the habitat of the world's only desert-nesting bald eagles. The lawsuit charges that the federal Bureau of Reclamation did not comply with the National Environmental Policy Act when it decided to make Cliff Dam a water storage component of the Central Arizona Project.

Maricopa Audubon Society of Phoenix has been fighting this dam—and its predecessor, the proposed Orme Dam at the confluence of the Salt and Verde rivers—for the better part of a decade. The dam's stated purpose is flood control, but in fact it will make available for development some 2,071 acres of highly flood-prone land in the bed of the Salt River in Phoenix—at a cost to the taxpayers

continued on page 11



Proposed dam site on the Verde River.
ROBERT A. WITZEMAN

Cliff Dam

continued from page 1

of \$800,000 per acre. The real estate development envisioned for the floodplain would itself consume more water than the dam would provide.

At a press conference in Phoenix, Maricopa Audubon Society President Herb Fibel explained the lawsuit: "A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was filed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation which described four alternative plans, each of which included Cliff Dam. No alternative to Cliff Dam was included. Prior to the issuance of the DEIS, the Bureau of Reclamation had studied alternatives to Cliff Dam that could have been included. But the government failed to include reasonable alternatives to Cliff Dam in the DEIS."

"Construction of Cliff Dam will seriously harm the small and precarious population of endangered desert bald eagles in the area," said Charlene Dougherty, National Audubon's director of legislation. "The Department of Interior proposes more studies on how best to save these eagles while still building Cliff Dam. The overlooked option for saving the eagles—and taxpayer dollars—is to not build Cliff."

"The overlooked option is to not build Cliff."

Plaintiffs in the litigation, in addition to Maricopa Audubon Society and National Audubon Society, are National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club, Arizona Wildlife Federation, Prescott Audubon Society, Friends of

the River, Environmental Policy Institute, American Rivers Conservation Council, Wilderness Society, Friends of the Earth, and National Parks and Conservation Association. Earlier this year, Audubon, National Wildlife Federation, Friends of the Earth, and the Environmental Policy Institute joined in forming a National Coalition to Stop Cliff Dam.

RAN



The proposed Cliff Dam would harm the small population of desert-nesting bald eagles.
LES LINE

SRP's lawyers intervene in lawsuit over Cliff Dam

The Phoenix Gazette
Wed., Dec. 18, 1985

Salt River Project lawyers have jumped into a legal battle over Cliff Dam on the Verde River.

More than a dozen environmental groups sued the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Sept. 19, complaining that Cliff Dam would destroy a nest used by endangered eagles.

The proposed \$385 million dam, awaiting approval by U.S. Interior Secretary Donald Hodel, would replace Horseshoe Dam and protect Bartlett Dam, water-conservation structures operated by the Salt River Project.

Environmentalists, including the Maricopa Audubon Society, contend that the Reclamation Bureau failed to prepare a sufficient environmental impact statement when Cliff Dam was included in a

package of water-conservation and flood-protection projects.

"Our purpose in intervening is to establish the validity" of the environmental impact statement, Jack Pfister, Salt River Project general manager, said Tuesday as the motion to intervene was filed in U.S. District Court.

The Central Arizona Water Conservation District, which will operate the Central Arizona Project, also is considering a motion to intervene.

Bill Swan of the U.S. Solicitor General's Office said he would file records on the environmental-protection process surrounding Cliff Dam, and request a judgment in favor of the Reclamation Bureau next month.

2 Scottsdale (Ariz.) Progress Tuesday, October 21, 1986

Anti-dam group wins battle

A federal judge denied a motion Monday filed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation that sought to limit evidence in the lawsuit filed by conservation groups to halt construction of Cliff Dam northeast of Scottsdale.

A motion to limit evidence in the lawsuit to the administrative record was turned down by U.S. District Court Judge Paul Rosenblatt in Phoenix.

The ruling will allow the National Coalition to Stop Cliff Dam to introduce other evidence in its lawsuit against the Bureau of Reclamation, said Gilbert Venable, the coalition's attorney.

The coalition is charging that the bureau failed to consider reasonable alternatives to building the \$390 million Cliff Dam on the Verde River.

The coalition contends that the dam would destroy habitat for bald

eagles that nest in the cliffs overlooking the proposed dam site.

Venable called the ruling a small step forward for the coalition's lawsuit.

The coalition includes the National Wildlife Federation, National Audubon Society, Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, Friends of the Earth, National Parks and Conservation Association, Friends of the River, American Rivers Conservation Council, Environmental Policy Institute, Arizona Wildlife Federation, Prescott Audubon Society and Maricopa Audubon Society.

SCOTTSDALE
Progress

JANUARY 1986/VOLUME 88, NUMBER 1

AUDUBON

The Magazine of the National Audubon Society

Desert Eagles

JAMES R. UDALL

"Say, have you noticed . . . This dam business is getting to be quite a racket."

—Will Rogers

THROUGH A SPOTTING scope, Jay Tischendorf peers at a granite cliff below which runs the Verde River in central Arizona. On the cliff is a nest. In the nest are two eaglets; their parents—one of only twenty known breeding pairs of Sonoran bald eagles—perch on a spire nearby.

The setting is extraordinary. The customary image of bald eagles is that of regal, white-headed raptors perched in conifers above a fog-shrouded river or lake. To see the magnificent birds in the desert, amid towering saguaro cactus, is a stirring affirmation of their adaptability and vigor.

"Like their northern cousins, these eagles depend on fish and thus on water," says Tischendorf's boss, Forest Service biologist Larry Forbis. "They differ in that they are smaller, breed earlier, and take more terrestrial prey, including jackrabbits, snakes, and skunks. Of course the most significant difference is that there are, in the Lower Forty-eight, roughly 13,000 northern bald eagles and about one hundred of these."

Ten years ago there were one-third that many; the Sonoran bald eagle teetered on the brink of extinction. Today, although their future remains uncertain,

the birds have made a dramatic comeback, thanks to an innovative Nest Watch Program begun by Forbis and the Maricopa Audubon Society; the program is staffed by dedicated volunteers like Jay Tischendorf.

Wearing cutoffs, combat boots, and safari hat, Tischendorf is built like a wrestler, tanned by months in the sun, and



Jay Tischendorf on eagle watch along Arizona's Verde River, and the site of the Bureau of Reclamation's proposed Cliff Dam: \$12 for a 16-hour day.

earnest about the ground rules: "You can't photograph the cliff, go closer than the jeep road, or describe the exact location of this nest."

It is late afternoon in early June. As the sun courts the horizon, cottonwoods lining the river take to the shadows. From those shadows, as if through a curtain, cliff swallows burst forth to swoop up gnats. It is a sublime moment, made more so by action in the aerie above.

Gravity's captives for eleven weeks, the eaglets now yearn for flight. Taking turns, they crouch, then leap into the air. Going up, they flap their wings with great gusto and little grace. At the top of their hop, they glance quickly from side to side as if admiring the view. Pretense is abandoned coming down, as they tumble into the nest. The spectacle is at once grave, comical, and thrilling.

The eaglets are due to fledge—to fly—within a week. Jay can hardly wait. For four months he and twenty-nine other volunteer "nest wardens" have safeguarded breeding pairs of this, the rarest population of our national bird.

Tischendorf arrived in Arizona in early February. After an orientation, he was assigned a nest site and partner, lent a spotting scope and binoculars, and dispatched into the field.

The schedule was ten days on, four off. During four of the days on, Jay and his partner, Catherine Frazer, were required to record all behavior at the nest from dawn to dusk. By late spring this was a sixteen-hour day, for which they were paid twelve dollars.

Asked if the work had not been at times grueling, Jay, a thoughtful twenty-two-year-old, replies, "No, it was good work. The birds made it worthwhile."

As daylight falters, the exhausted eaglets slump together in the center of the nest. A great blue heron labors past. Two ravens circle the aerie, taunting the adults. "Right on time," says Jay. "The Heckle and Jeckle Show."

Ravens routed, night falls. Jay returns to camp, his exultation marred by the knowledge that the Bureau of Reclamation wants to build a dam two miles downstream.

Cliff Dam is part—the most superfluous part—of the \$3.6 billion Central Arizona Project. The CAP's primary

purpose is to bring water from the Colorado River to central Arizona. Cliff Dam does nothing to advance that goal. What it would do is provide flood control for Phoenix, fifty miles downstream; store a small amount of water; produce no hydropower; inundate six miles of irreplaceable riparian habitat; have an impact on three eagle nests while drowning a fourth; and cost \$385 million.

Even in Arizona, where any water project is a good water project (if, of course, it's federally funded), the justification for Cliff Dam seems so tenuous as to be puzzling.

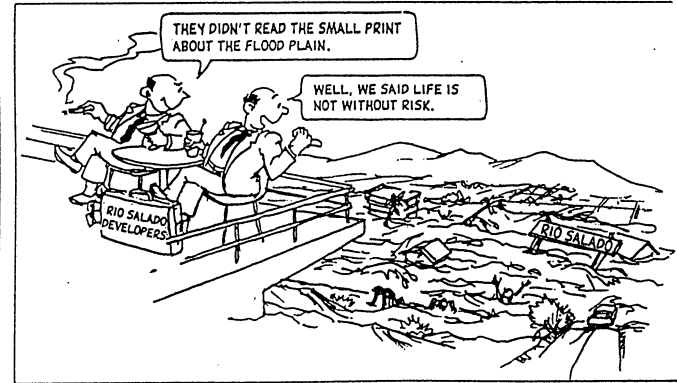
What brings the puzzle into focus is the addition of another piece, called Rio Salado. This is a grandiose scheme to develop seventeen miles of the Salt River, which bisects Phoenix. In the words of the plan's proponents, "Rio Salado would transform a virtually lifeless wasteland into a flourishing cultural and economic center." The \$1 billion development is the largest ever proposed for the Sunbelt, and it has the backing of almost every influential politician in the state.

On casual inspection Rio Salado doesn't seem like a bad idea: The riverbed is a wasteland that has been used for decades as a dumping ground. Furthermore, ninety-nine days out of a hundred the riverbed is dry, seemingly vacant. The rub is that the Salt, whose major tributary is the Verde, occasionally floods. Then it can, for brief periods, carry more water than the Ohio, Yukon, or Columbia rivers.

That's no problem, unless you want to plunk a convention center, a children's museum, golf courses, hotels, factories, 16,000 condominiums, and 36,000 people not on the riverbanks but on the river bottom, smack in the middle of the floodplain. This, says Herb Fibel, president of the Maricopa Audubon Society, "is the ultimate in environmental lunacy."

Hoping to stick the nation's taxpayers with its bill, Arizona politicians are loath to admit the obvious: Cliff Dam has more in common with Rio Salado than it ever could have with the CAP. For until the dam is in place, controlling the Verde's floodwaters, Rio Salado cannot proceed. Thus do eagles come into conflict with man.

NO ONE KNOWS how many Sonoran bald eagles historically lived in the Southwest. Stephen Hoffman, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, guesses that up to two hundred pairs were once scattered along the region's rivers. "But by the late 1800s,"



This illustration was not part of the National Audubon magazine.

says Hoffman, "overgrazing and land mismanagement had severely disrupted many watersheds. And by then most of the eagles were gone."

After the cow, the farmer. By 1950 almost every southwestern river had been divvied up, dammed, and diverted. As rivers ran dry, the bald eagle's range, which had encompassed a seven-state area, shrank like a punctured balloon.

By 1977 fewer than three dozen eagles were making their last stand near the confluence of the Salt and Verde. Targeted by weekend warriors, isolated, inbred, the population was winding down.

In that year, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and the Forest Service initiated a recovery plan. The key objective, considered ambitious at the time, was to double reproduction from six to twelve young per year.

That goal has been far surpassed: Twenty-two eaglets fledged in 1985. The total population may now exceed one hundred. "In 1977 we were at a place where we could have lost the birds," says Forbis. "To have tripled the population in only eight years . . . well, it's just remarkable. Much, if not most, of the credit is due the Nest Watch Program."

A nest warden's duties include col-

lecting behavioral data, enforcing nest site closures, and intervening to rescue eagles if necessary. During the past four years, wardens saved the lives of fifteen eaglets, nine in 1984 alone.

In one case, two chicks whose nest was inundated by a flood were fostered into another nest where eggs had failed to hatch. In a second case, after a limb broke in high winds, a nest cradling two eaglets plunged into the river below. Fished out by their wardens, within six hours the eaglets were safe in a new nest, reconstructed from the original, lower in the same snag.

Since 1.8 million Phoenicians live nearby, wardens also attempt to buffer the birds from the hordes of fishermen, river runners, target shooters, and aircraft which descend each weekend. Notes taken by Tischendorf illustrate the overall flavor and frustrations of the work. His day begins peacefully, but by midafternoon the young man's equanimity has eroded.

0736 Female has wings spread and is barring her breast to the morning sun. Sittin' in the morning sun I'll be sittin' here when evening comes

Otis Redding

0743 Male taps rt. foot several times then tucks it up into belly feathers.

0821 A plane, flying low, N1520C.

1057 A few minutes ago, a plane at 200' passed overhead. Now it returns. Marvelous. Just like earlier this morning.

1217 Lunch over. Velveeta on tortillas with salsa. *Si señor, es muy bueno.* 3 men in an aluminum boat paddle upstream. 1st see them below the nest—have no idea where they're from.

1232 I nearly swam the Verde to get at those ignoramuses, but since they paddled up the stagnant strip I figured they'd be gone before I had a chance to speak with them.

1515 Helicopter N2297C passes at 250' moving north. GO AWAY!

1532 This time it's one of those white choppers and it's low—less than 100' and passing right above the aerie. I see the top of its rotor blades are striped. THAT'S IT! YOUR BUTT IS BOUND FOR A SLING!

In April 1984 the Department of the Interior put Cliff Dam on hold, pending a study of its environmental impacts. Caught in a thicket of scientific uncertainty and political controversy, the study's release was postponed three times.

Since so little is known about the population dynamics of the Sonoran bald eagle, it's hard to assess the dam's impact on them. The Bureau of Reclamation does, however, acknowledge a "deleterious" effect on the aerie that Tischendorf guards. No kidding! As Cliff Dam's reservoir rose, first to go would be the shimmering cottonwoods. Shortly thereafter, lapping water would transmute the eagle nest into driftwood.

In time, carp and catfish would swim where eaglets had hopped.

Contemplating this, Jay has written, "The sad part is that the eagles have no say. Daily they go about their activities oblivious to the wheels of man which turn against them until the day when the wheels come crashing in on their sacred life. Eagles, I'm sorry. You've been beat."

It is a poignant irony that the success of the Nest Watch Program, which owes so much to the sweat of volunteers like Tischendorf, is cited as the reason Cliff Dam would not jeopardize the survival of the eagles.

Surprisingly, Larry Forbis, the program's founder, shares this view. "Now that we've got twenty breeding pairs, one nesting site may not be critical," he says. The statement sounds almost boastful, until Forbis bares his bias. "If the dam is built the Forest Service can claim some water." (The eagles' plight in a nutshell: They are competing for water in one of the West's most arid states. And one of their competitors is the agency that is responsible for protecting them.)

Other biologists, however, are less sanguine. "If you consider the big picture—Cliff Dam, the CAP, recreational pressures, natural mortality—the status of Sonoran bald eagles remains critical," says Bob Mesta of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Rich Glinski of the Arizona Game and Fish Department says, "Sure, the eagles have done well in the last five years. But that's just a flicker of time. They could take a nose dive in the next five. Because there's so little good habitat left, they will always be in dire straits."

"Personally, I am unwilling to take the chance the eagles can survive Cliff Dam," says Dick Bauman, a former Bureau of Reclamation biologist. It was Bauman who, to the unending dismay of that agency, first discovered what is now

called the Cliff Nest on April 12, 1984, nine days after Cliff Dam had been tentatively approved.

CLIFF DAM is a bastard by-product of Bob Witzeman's greatest triumph. During the late 1970s, Witzeman, an anesthesiologist, citizen crusader, eagle partisan, and past president of the Maricopa Audubon Society, was instrumental in stopping Orme Dam at the confluence of the Salt and Verde. Although he had salvaged two nests and more than fifteen miles of prime eagle habitat, Witzeman would not savor his victory for long.

Soon after Orme was canned, the Bureau of Reclamation advanced its "preferred alternative," Plan 6. Plan 6 is western water politics at its most bizarre. Instead of one \$229 million Orme Dam, the bureau proposed to build two new dams (Cliff is one); to repair two existing dams; and to dismantle a fifth dam—at a cost of \$1.1 billion.

"Does it make sense," asks Witzeman, "to spend a billion bucks to repair dams, store surplus CAP water, and control floods which might come once in a century, last a few days, and do little damage? Of course not—unless you want to pave the way for Rio Salado."

It began as a dream. In 1966 Arizona State University professor James Elmore asked an urban design class to conceive a plan to revitalize the Salt River. Given free rein, the students came up with a proposal one critic has called "a vision in search of reality."

For starters, the students thought Phoenix should be a seaport. Apparently, this was to be achieved by dredging the Salt and Gila rivers for 200 miles, all the way to the Colorado. (The tough sailing does not end there. Reaching the Sea of Cortez would require negotiating one dam and thirty miles of dry riverbed—niggling problems the students did not deign to address.)

Within Phoenix, the students envisioned an immense regional park, five times the size of New York's Central Park. The Salt's braided channel would provide the motif: Artificial islands, dotted with hotels, condos, and office buildings, would be flanked by skinny lakes. Recreational amenities would include riding trails, golf courses, whitewater rapids, marinas, and "wooded islands for nature observation."

This vision—minus seaport—is essentially the one being promoted today. (A cheaper, more sensible alternative, which does not require Cliff Dam since building would occur only on the river's banks, was rejected because it reclaimed

less land for development.)

Since Rio Salado would be financed with public funds, yet generate \$2.4 billion in private profits, it has always enjoyed the avid support of local businessmen. But there is more to the project than avariciousness; it represents an esthetic impulse as well.

There may be Sunbelt cities where the climate is agreeable year round, but Phoenix is not one of them. For three months each summer the temperature hovers over 100 degrees. Pedestrians' shoes sink into the pavement. More sensible citizens scurry from one air-conditioned niche to the next, futilely trying to avoid breaking into a sweat. It is this relentless heat that Rio Salado, with 2,000 acres of Bermuda grass and ornamental lakes, promises to assuage.

Through the profligate use of water—as much as that used by 100,000 people—Rio Salado would become the world's largest artificial oasis. Witzeman thinks this is a wasteful aberration; Bill Schulz, who in 1980 drafted a bill authorizing Rio Salado and ramrodded it through the state legislature, thinks it is a handsome dream.

Schulz, like most Phoenicians, grew up east of the Mississippi. Moving to Arizona, he made a fortune selling lav-

For one thing it is deserted—on Saturday afternoon. Grass has been planted, but the soil seems more hospitable in some places than others. Off to one side, a pool of mystery fluid is surrounded by a high fence, whose warning signs seem superfluous. Nearby, two stacks burn methane emitted by the garbage underfoot. Except that it's not all garbage.

Arsenic, cyanide, methylene chloride, trichloroethylene—a four-page list of poisonous and carcinogenic chemicals—are known to have been buried. Unfortunately, it's not known what went where. Gerard O'Connell, chief of the Maricopa County Bureau of Public Health Engineering, says, "There were no operators, no permits, no fees. Anyone could dump anything." At some dumps "anything that did not explode when a Caterpillar tractor rolled over it was okay," recalls G. M. Merrill, a Phoenix city engineer.

"It's not outside the realm of possibility that the whole Salt River in Phoenix may become a Superfund site," says Chuck Anders, environmental chief for the Arizona Department of Health Services.

Sixty million dollars for the cleanup—which will probably cost \$500 million—has finally been included in the \$1 bil-

ionly landscaped apartment buildings. An energetic man, Schulz shares a common atavistic desire to re-create, in the desert, the green landscape of his boyhood. In a recent letter to prominent Phoenicians, Schulz wrote: "In '82... I walked the seven miles of the English Gardens along... the Isar River in Munich. Like Rio Salado will be, it's big and breathtakingly beautiful. There are recreational, eating, and drinking establishments along its way. Over 200 years old, it was full of people enjoying every recreation, including nudists cavorting with Frisbees."

Failing to note that what's appropriate in Munich, which gets thirty-five inches of rain per year, might not be appropriate in Phoenix, which gets seven, Schulz went on to discuss another stumbling block: 300 poor Hispanic and black families who must be relocated. "These people see Rio Salado as a creature of the... country-club set. They are suspicious... and not without reason... They all will have to move."

There was a danger, Schulz warned, that these people would "network with environmental objectors to a Verde dam, and with all the negative souls in our community." (Some resent the label. Peter Kay, a state legislator, sarcastically

says, "If you support Rio Salado you are, by definition, visionary. If you oppose it you are myopic. There's a clear-cut decision. You are either brilliant or you are a jackass.")

The jackasses have begun to proliferate. "This Rio Salado project is as crooked as a dog's hind leg and a sidewinder put together," says Joyce Ward, a member of Concerned Citizens on the Rio Salado Project. "They want to uproot us to build golf courses," says Claro Gonzales, another member. "But I don't know anybody who plays golf."

As the suspicion grows that Rio Salado's benefits will accrue to the few rather than the many, discovery of toxic wastes in some of the fifty landfills located in the Salt's riverbed has further tarnished the dream.

Touring these dumps with Witzeman is nerve-racking, in more ways than one. En route he picks up a salad at a fast-food joint. The waitress fails to give him a fork. Weaving through heavy traffic, Witzeman points with one hand, scoops lettuce with the other, and occasionally interrupts dinner to steer. The tour includes two polluted landfills and a park built on top of a third. The park is called Rio Salado Park, but it does not much resemble the English Gardens.

WHEN I LAST SAW HIM, nest warden Tischendorf was awaiting a miracle no less astounding for being so commonplace: a bird's sudden resolution, on fledging, of the mysteries of flight. Of that event, he would write:

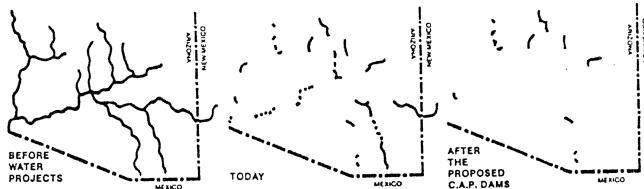
"After eighty-eight days bound to their nest, the eaglets fledged. On June 7th one nestling repeatedly crossed the gully adjacent to the nest, flying back each time. I didn't think it was quite ready to take that first 'step,' so I returned to camp. Besides, it was 112 degrees. As it turned out I missed that bird's first flight, but later watched as it flew around the cliffs, clumsily attempted to land on a nearly sheer face, then passed out of view.

"Figuring its sibling would follow suit the next day, I ascended to the lookout at 0430. As I reckoned, it did fledge, just after dawn.

"When I last saw the eagles all four were in view. The adults were perched separately, the eaglets were flying about, soaring and circling as the sun set. Their landings were no longer clumsy.

"That was a fulfilling moment for me. My job was over. Walking away, I could only hope these new eagles will have suitable habitat in which to nest and produce eaglets of their own." ♠

DEATH OF AN ECOSYSTEM



This illustration was not part of the National Audubon magazine.