

## 22Apr7 Volunteers Needed to Gather Signatures for Douglas Basin AMA Petitions - Bisbee Observer LTE

My letter below appeared in the *Bisbee Observer* today minus the opening two paragraphs.

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To the Editor, *Bisbee Observer*

It's no secret that groundwater is fast disappearing in the Sulphur Springs Valley, the huge expanse of land that stretches from Willcox to Douglas and from the Mules and Dragoons on the west to the Chiricahua-Peloncillo-Pedregosa ranges on the east.

Due to an utter lack of protective state and federal laws, the insatiable thirst of corporate agriculture and the unconscionable collusion of senators and representatives to the state legislature, the water levels have been dropping several feet per year, large fissures have opened in the valley floor in several places, and smallholders' wells are being sucked dry by the overpumping at large farms and enormous dairy (i.e., livestock) operations in the valley.

To date, our best shot at checking this environmental and community destruction has been the effort to get two initiatives on the ballot this coming November, two community-based measures that are identical except that one is for protection of the Willcox Basin (the part of the aquifer between Willcox and Elfrida), the other for the Douglas Basin (the part from Elfrida to the US-Mexico border).

If the ballot measures get enough votes, the state Department of Water Resources will then draw up, with (presumably) meaningful input from local voters, rules to protect the basins from overpumping, a process which could take several years.

Such rules, which establish what are known as Active Management Areas (AMAs) were required (and continue in effect) for the major urban areas of the state (notably, not Sierra Vista) under the 1980 Groundwater Act, but thanks to intense objections from agricultural and real estate interests, rural areas were exempted from the law. If successful, the current AMA citizen effort would correct that mistake.

Among other positive results, once filed and verified, the petitions would require a moratorium on drilling of new agricultural wells in the Sulphur Springs Valley. Smallholder and residential well-drilling would not be affected, nor the existing agricultural pumping by Big Ag, but preventing more wells while the AMA rules are being developed would be a major benefit.

For several months, concerned citizens have been circulating petitions to get enough signatures to get those measures on the ballot. Recently, enough petitions were submitted to state and county offices to do just that for the Willcox Basin. Now the drive is on to get enough signatures for the Douglas Basin.

Headed up by the non-profit Arizona Water Defenders (AWD) organization, the push needs the

help of individuals and other organizations to get the required signatures collected and filed before the June deadline.

AWD will be holding a community meeting to share information and collect signatures at the 10th St Park in Douglas from 11:00 - 2:00 on Saturday, April 16th. For more information and to volunteer your help, check out

[www.arizonawaterdefenders.org](http://www.arizonawaterdefenders.org) and contact [arizonawaterdefenders@gmail.com](mailto:arizonawaterdefenders@gmail.com).