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See press release online [here](#).

Watershed Alliance Asks Court To Halt Massive San Pedro Development

Corps blindly issued critical permit for 12,000-acre development that threatens San Pedro River watershed

without the comprehensive environmental review required by federal law

Tucson, AZ — A coalition of groups dedicated to protecting the San Pedro River watershed filed their [opening brief](#) challenging the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' failure to analyze the significant, adverse effects of a massive 12,167 acre master-planned community on the San Pedro River before issuing a permit under Section 404 of the U.S. Clean Water Act. That failure violates both the Clean Water Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. The opening brief follows closely on the heels of an [important ruling](#) by the Court regarding the evidence of improper political interference in the decision-making process.

The San Pedro River is the last, major free-flowing river in the desert Southwest, a sanctuary for millions of migratory birds, and home to multiple endangered species, including the jaguar, western yellow-billed cuckoo, southwestern willow flycatcher, northern Mexican gartersnake, and Huachuca water umbel. Sustained by both surface flows and groundwater that percolates to the surface, the River stands out as a ribbon of green in an otherwise arid environment; it is a lifeline for the wildlife that find refuge and water in the relative cool of the River's cottonwood forests, as depicted in this [short video](#).

El Dorado Benson, LLC proposes to construct a massive, 20 square-mile development adjacent to the San Pedro River. The development would include 28,000 new homes, 3 million square feet of commercial space, and golf courses, lakes, fountains and verdant landscaping — in the middle of the Sonoran desert. The development would depend solely on pumping groundwater at a rate of 7.5 million gallons per day, which would threaten the aquifer that supports the San Pedro River's surface flows. To proceed with the development, El Dorado depends on a critical Clean Water Act permit from the Corps.

Excessive groundwater pumping is already threatening the River and its riparian vegetation and springs. Yet, the Corps refused to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the development's impacts on the San Pedro River before granting El Dorado a key Clean Water Act permit for the development.

"The proposed Vigneto development would drain the lifeblood from the San Pedro River, robbing it of its water and destroying riparian ecosystems that sustain life in our dry state," said **Sandy Bahr, chapter director for Sierra Club's Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter**. "The failure to analyze these impacts is unconscionable, irresponsible, and unlawful. The Corps must do its job and evaluate impacts, alternatives, and seek to mitigate the impacts or deny the permit and protect this desert jewel, the San Pedro River."

"Enormous conservation investments have been made along the entire San Pedro River because of its now-unique status in the region as the last remaining natural and intact desert river ecosystem," said **Peter Else of the Lower San Pedro Watershed Alliance**. "To protect these ecological investments and under Federal law, the impacts of the proposed Vigneto development must be analyzed."

"Vigneto would be another nail in the San Pedro's coffin, and plainly fails to comply with bedrock environmental laws," said **Robin Silver, Co-founder and Board Member of the Center for Biological Diversity**. "Trying to create a lush version of Italy in the Chihuahuan Desert is insane. It is not sustainable."

"The Corps tried to circumvent the law by ignoring the significant, far reaching consequences of granting a Clean Water Act permit for the Vigneto development," said **Earthjustice attorney Stu Gillespie**. "That tactic has already been rejected by the courts as it subverts the fundamental requirement to 'look before you leap.' The Corps cannot grant a key permit for a massive development without analyzing the consequences."

Earthjustice is representing Lower San Pedro Watershed Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club, Maricopa Audubon Society, Tucson Audubon Society and Cascabel Conservation Association in this lawsuit that asks the court to vacate the permit and compel the Corps to conduct a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement as required by NEPA and to comply with all CWA requirements.