



A River Reborn

The Restoration of Fossil Creek



For Immediate National Release / Nov. 27, 2006

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For many decades, dams were seen as icons of progress, but in recent years new information about the harmful environmental effects of dams has come to light. Today, a broad reassessment of dams is taking place in all parts of the United States, including the Southwest, where water resources are especially critical. An important focal point for the debate over dams is Fossil Creek in central Arizona. There, a century-old hydroelectric facility is being decommissioned and an important watershed restored.

The Merriam-Powell Center at Northern Arizona University is pleased to announce the release of an award-winning documentary about the ground setting developments at Fossil Creek. Two years in the making, the public television production, titled *A River Reborn: The Restoration of Fossil Creek*, presents a critical examination of dam decommissioning and watershed restoration.

Fossil Creek is among the brightest jewels of Arizona's Rim Country. It stands out as one of the last free-flowing, year-around streams in Arizona, a magnificent ribbon of life in the high desert. The restoration of this critical watershed has drawn wide attention, not only in Arizona but across the U.S. "Vital lessons are being learned at Fossil Creek," says Emmy award-winning producer Paul Bockhorst, "lessons that can be applied to environmental restoration projects elsewhere. That makes Fossil Creek a case study of national and even international importance."

A River Reborn is narrated by Ted Danson. The award-winning actor grew up in Flagstaff, Arizona and continues to have a deep interest in environmental affairs in his native state. "The Fossil Creek story provides a beacon of hope and an inspiring model for the restoration of degraded streams and waterways," Danson says in the documentary. He also tells viewers that, "Even now, as a work in progress, Fossil Creek stands out as one of the most important and promising environmental restoration projects in the history of the American Southwest."

A River Reborn chronicles both the natural and human history of the scenic waterway. It introduces scientists who have investigated Fossil Creek's outstanding biological and geological features, environmental advocates who have fought for its restoration, federal and state resource managers who are working to establish it as a refuge for threatened native fish, and officials at Arizona Public Service, the utility that ran the hydroelectric facilities for a century.

Jack Stanford of the University of Montana is a national authority on the effect of dams and diversions on rivers and watersheds. In the documentary, Stanford shares his research findings regarding the harmful impact of dams, especially on biological diversity: "We realized that much of the native biodiversity was often lost," he says. "Native plants and animals simply couldn't handle the change, the manipulation of the river." Stanford also comments on the growing list of dams being decommissioned across the country: "Dams just don't contribute in the same way to the well-being of humans that they did when they were originally built. So decommissioning them is clearly in the best economic interest in many cases."

Andrew Fahlund, Vice President for Conservation at American Rivers, a national environmental advocacy organization based in Washington, DC, amplifies Stanford's comments. "We have constructed approximately 75,000 relatively large dams in this country over the past two hundred years," Fahlund says. "I think we need to have a national dialogue about striking a balance on our nation's rivers. There are many dams out there that simply do not make sense anymore, from an economic standpoint, from an ecological standpoint."

One of the most surprising aspects of the story of Fossil Creek is that the decision to decommission was reached without litigation. A number of private environmental organizations, state and federal agencies, and Arizona Public Service (APS), the utility company that owned and operated the dam, reached a comprehensive agreement through constructive engagement and dialogue. The result is a notable win-win settlement that many see as a model for the cooperative resolution of environmental controversies. In the documentary, William Post, the Chairman of APS, explains his decision to support decommissioning: "As we looked at the opportunity to give the residents of the state of Arizona a perennial stream in the desert, there is no option to that. We can find other ways to generate electricity. We cannot find other perennial streams in the desert."

Fossil Creek is also noteworthy for the vital role that science has played in the effort to restore native fish populations in Fossil Creek. Original research conducted by Jane Marks and other scientists from the Northern Arizona University predicted recovery of those populations after decommissioning and

resumption of full flow. Ongoing research also plays an important part in the adaptive management model being used by state and federal agencies with management responsibilities in the Fossil Creek watershed. Experience gained at Fossil Creek shows that good science is an indispensable ingredient in wise management.

A River Reborn is a joint project of Northern Arizona University, the Museum of Northern Arizona, and Paul Bockhorst Productions. The one-hour documentary was written and produced by Emmy Award-winning producer Paul Bockhorst and photographed by Emmy Award-winning videographer Douglas Crawford. The original music was composed by Paul Morehouse, and the program was edited by Russell Colby. Support for *A River Reborn* was provided by the National Science Foundation, the USDI Bureau of Reclamation, and the Heritage Program of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, with additional funding from the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, the Merriam-Powell Center for Environmental Research, and the Ecological Restoration Institute at Northern Arizona University.

A River Reborn will have its television debut on Arizona Public Television (KAET) on Wednesday, January 17, 2007 at 9:00 p.m. The documentary will be distributed to public television stations nationwide by NETA, the National Educational Telecommunications Association. The NETA satellite uplink is scheduled for Feb. 3, 2007.

For further information about *A River Reborn* and related educational materials, please visit the website: www.RiverReborn.org or contact:

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