



**Western
Watersheds
Project**

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Working to protect and restore Western Watersheds

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WIN FOR THE WHETSTONES!
Conservation interests prevail in grazing appeal decision

Tucson, Arizona – The Coronado National Forest has withdrawn a controversial plan to drill water wells and install pipelines in numerous remote areas in the Whetstone Mountains southeast of Tucson, near Kartchner Caverns State Park. Western Watersheds Project's Arizona office challenged the plan, which would have benefited commercial cattle grazing in the remote and roadless mountain range. The group challenged the plan because of the impacts it would have on area wildlife and its potential to prevent the Whetstone region from ever achieving status as a Wilderness Area.

"This is a world-class wildlife site that any bird watcher can tell you about" said Tucson Attorney Erik Ryberg, who filed the group's challenge to the plan. "It is flanked by the San Pedro River and the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area, it is mostly roadless, and it has natural water year-round. Migratory birds converge here just as they do in neighboring Madera Canyon and the Chiricahua Mountains."

The mountain range, which culminates at 7,711 feet on Apache Peak, is unmatched for its biological diversity and is inappropriate for water withdrawals and livestock grazing. "The native wildlife needs every bit of the water that is there now," he said, and he noted that officials at Kartchner Caverns also questioned the wisdom of further water withdrawals upstream of the State Park.

Much of the area is also a roadless area, meaning it could qualify as a federally-protected Wilderness Area. The roads, wells, and pipelines included in the decision would have eliminated that protection.

"We're very pleased that this project has been withdrawn and the Whetstone Mountains will remain roadless" Ryberg said. "But we'll be keeping our eyes open for future plans of the same nature, because the people who want this water now are not going to go away."

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Western Watersheds Project is a conservation group committed to restoring western lands for native wildlife. www.westernwatersheds.org

For more information about our organization or the Whetstone Mountain grazing appeal, please visit our website.