

With one stroke of his pen, Gov. Bill Richardson gave away our water and our money. On Thursday, Richardson vetoed \$945,000 in funding requested by the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer and the Interstate Stream Commission for scientific studies on the Gila River.

In the Arizona Water Settlements Act, signed into law in 2004, the southwest region of New Mexico was allocated up to 14,000 acre-feet of water from the Gila and San Francisco rivers, along with \$66 million to fund water projects in the area.

These proposed projects never included a dam, and might only have included a diversion, if scientific studies showed it was feasible without doing damage to the ecology of the rivers.

We, as residents of southwest New Mexico, want to see science determine whether any water may be used from the river. If evidence shows that taking water from the river is detrimental to the river's health, then that is rock-solid documentation that the river should run free.

However, if science shows that water may be used for the benefit of southwest New Mexico without harming the ecology of the river, we should see that as an opportunity to secure our water future.

Regardless of the outcome, these studies would have provided the most comprehensive examination of the Gila and San Francisco rivers possible, including their ecology and wildlife, and any environmental impacts.

Environmentalists used to favor science and the data it provided. Richardson's veto means we may never know if or how humans are impacting the river systems in our region, and may never assess the overall health of those systems. By promoting this veto, environmentalists have turned their back on fact-finding.

If you don't have science, you don't have knowledge.

Silver City and the region have sustained an economic blow with this veto, because we lost funding for scientific studies that would have laid the groundwork for knowledge. And this blow is a result of misinformation from the environmental community — whose members said the funding was for a dam — and its deep pockets on a national level.

Get the rest of the country out of our business. This is a local issue and should be decided on a local level, without improper influence from out-of-state interests. Many of these interests come from Arizona and California, which are already using our water.

The AWSA was an attempt to ensure the region received its share of water, as allocated in 1968 legislation, but which has been consistently stolen from our area and reallocated to interests downstream, such as the unbridled growth of Tucson and Phoenix, Ariz.

Give science a chance to determine once and for all whether the Gila River runs free or has a minimal amount of water removed at flood stages to benefit the river and the area.