WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell this evening voted to restore a key desert ecosystem in Arizona's Fifth Congressional District that was included in H.R. 1495, the conference report for the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). Mitchell and the House voted to approve the measure with a bipartisan 381 to 40 vote. [Roll Call Vote No. 790]

"With a limited water supply, Arizona's economy depends on our ability to reliably and efficiently control our precious resources," said Mitchell. "Restoring the Va Shly'ay Akimel ecosystem is an important investment in our environment and economy."

The legislation authorizes the Va Shly'ay Akimel ecosystem restoration project along the Salt River, which would restore and improve approximately 1,487 acres of habitat, including 200 acres of wetlands and 24 acres of Sonoran desert scrub shrub.

Restoration in urban setting is particularly important because while riparian areas represent only 1 percent of the Southwestern landscape, 75 to 90 percent of Western wildlife depends on them.

In Arizona, more than 90 percent of riparian areas have been lost due to impacts from European settlement and urbanization.

WRDA authorizes $21 billion for the construction of more than 900 water projects by the Army Corps of Engineers. The projects primarily aid flood control, navigation and provide for environmental restoration.

The legislation also authorizes $1.9 billion for hurricane relief projects in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and a new national levee safety program.

In addition to Va Shly'ay Akimel, WRDA authorizes several other Arizona projects.