

Issue: AZ - Environment

Water – Talking Points

Almost 90% of Arizona’s population lives in a desert climate, making proactive water management a vital necessity across the state.

Within Actively Managed Areas (AMAs) established by Arizona’s Groundwater Management Act (1980), responsible water usage controls have been partially successful. Outside the AMAs however, the *laissez-faire* water policies carried over from frontier days fail to ensure that Arizona will thrive economically and socially into the future. Landowners have long had the right to pump as much ground water as they want, as long as it’s put to “reasonable use” such as farming. Drought, the rapid depletion of ground water accumulated over thousands of years, and insufficient protection for clean water sources threaten to leave Arizonans high and dry.

Threats to Health, Wildlife, Clean Water Supply

As many as one in three Navajo lack running water, have no sink or flush toilet, and must travel long distances to fetch water. In the pandemic, when the first line of defense is simple handwashing, **the inordinate number of COVID-related deaths within the Navajo Nation starkly illustrates what happens when safe water is unavailable.**

Overuse of surface water has dried up many of Arizona’s river flows, resulting in the loss of fish, wildlife, and riparian habitat. Up to 90% of Arizona’s riparian forest habitat has already been lost.

Climate change’s decreasing rainfall and longer, hotter wildfire seasons pollutes the water supply with ash and other toxic runoff. After the Sunflower fire in 2012, Scottsdale had to shut down its water treatment facility because of the high levels of organic material in the water. The Bighorn fire is having a similar effect in the Catalinas this year.

Republican Response: Toothless

The Federal Clean Water Act of 1972, which had ensured clean-water regulation of the waterways, arroyos, and washes that characterize much of Arizona’s hydrology, has come under legal challenge since the Trump Administration rolled back scores of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) controls. **Some 17 states have challenged the EPA rollbacks, but not Arizona’s Republican leadership.** Arizona should support Congressional action to include non-navigable water to protect its water resources.

Due to a 20-year drought, Arizona’s entitlement to Colorado River water will be reduced 12% from non-drought levels. Those at the bottom of the seniority ladder—including some Pinal County farmers—may see their allowances fall to *zero* by 2023. The Republican-proposed solution is an amendment to SB1227, passed in 2019. It substitutes more groundwater pumping to cover the expected surface water shortfall. **This is no solution at all, since groundwater is a finite and dwindling resource that is not being replenished.**

The State Legislature: Custodians of Arizona’s Water Supply

The state legislature is uniquely empowered to act as custodians of the state’s diminishing water supply. Issues that legislators must take up to safeguard water resources include:

- Correct the overestimation of water available from the Colorado River.
- Properly measure and regulate groundwater drawn outside AMAs. Developers can take an unsustainable amount of water from a local aquifer as long as they pay a water authority in some other area to pump surface water back into a different aquifer. As the local water table drops, there is no assurance that the water elsewhere will be available.
- Stop 'Buy and Dry' tactics. Landowners (increasingly, investors) may drill a well and pump any water they can tap, regardless of the effect on their neighbors' wells. There have been attempts to buy land, pump it dry, and sell the water—a practice known as 'Buy and Dry.' Once drained, aquifers will not recover.

See complete report: [Arizona Water Policy](#)

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