

Colorado River Shortage Highlights the Importance of Improved Groundwater Management

As another anniversary of the 1980 Groundwater Management Act (GMA) passes, the importance of protecting our groundwater remains the same. We recognize that the GMA was a monumental piece of legislation. Still, the need to address groundwater issues across our State continues to grow, especially as we prepare for a Colorado River shortage, which will cause an increase in groundwater use in Arizona.



Effective water management & efficient water use provide the foundation for us to grow, prosper & remain sustainable despite challenges like drought and shortage. And as we look back, we recognize that the GMA and the [100-Year Assured Water Supply Program](#) brought many benefits to the Phoenix area cities, which is why AMWUA is vigilant about protecting them. For example, the GMA and Assured Water Supply Program have reduced groundwater reliance by requiring water users in all sectors – cities, agriculture, industry - to use less groundwater. They have also motivated the AMWUA cities to support new water resources, including constructing the Central Arizona Project (CAP), creating a more robust collective water portfolio.

Even with the benefits gained during the last 41 years, we need to take an honest look at how we can improve water management within and outside the Active Management Areas (AMAs). Arizona does the best job of managing its water in the West, but we are not perfect. While the overall usage of groundwater in our State has been reduced, we still can make improvements on how we manage this fundamental water source. In fact, in some areas of Arizona, groundwater remains the only water source.

As we face an ever-drier future, several challenges need to be addressed, including:

- Large volumes of groundwater pumping continue to be allowed in the AMAs without the requirement or obligation to replenish or replace the water withdrawn.
- [Recharging water](#) in one part of an AMA but then recovering those supplies in another area of an AMA can create or worsen localized groundwater depletion.
- Additional tools are needed to effectively manage localized groundwater depletion in and out of AMAs.
- Developing viable long-term water supplies and building infrastructure in areas currently dependent upon just groundwater.

- Guaranteeing the Arizona Department of Water Resources has adequate staffing and funding to address all of the State's water management challenges more effectively.

Efforts to address groundwater issues in and out of AMAs in Arizona are a focus of the Governor's Water Augmentation, Innovation & Conservation Council's committees. While discussions about water management improvements need to continue, the Council eventually will need to take action to make a positive impact. Improvements are even more vital as the imbalance between available water supplies and demands will inevitably drive additional groundwater declines, and as shortages, drought, and growing demand place increasing pressure on the State's other water supplies.

We have come a long way since the passage of the GMA 41 years ago. It has given us a solid foundation of proactive water management that has enabled the AMWUA cities to grow, prosper and thrive in the middle of an arid State. Yet, we need to continue to improve on how we protect and manage our groundwater to sustain it as a water source for when we may need it most, especially as we face the consequences of both a historic drought and a Colorado River shortage.

This previously written three-part series on groundwater took a look back at the past to acknowledge how far we have come, discussed the challenges and the groundwater pumping concerns we still collectively face.

[Groundwater in Arizona: Past, Present, and Future - Part One](#)

[Groundwater in Arizona: Past, Present, and Future - Part Two](#)

[Groundwater in Arizona: Past, Present, and Future - Part Three](#)

For over 50 years, the Arizona Municipal Water Users Association has helped protect our member cities' ability to provide assured, safe, and sustainable water supplies to their communities. For more information, visit www.amwua.org.

Stay up to date & sign up for the AMWUA Blog: