

Legislative Session Highlights Importance of Investing in Water

The marathon, six-month 2021 legislative session officially concluded after over 1,700 pieces of legislation were introduced. As always, water was a prominent topic, with more than 60 individual bills related to Arizona's water laws introduced amid the many issues discussed and debated by Arizona's lawmakers.

Every session, AMWUA monitors proposed legislation, tracking and thoroughly reviewing all bills to monitor for water-related impacts. We do this to ensure responsible lawmaking that protects our members' water supplies, ensuring water for their residents and businesses. This session was no different, and at the direction of its Board of Directors, AMWUA took formal positions on 45 pieces of legislation. In addition, AMWUA led a collaborative effort to pass one significant bill - SB 1147, which will streamline the recovery of water stored underground, ultimately benefiting customers of all municipal water providers.



From a water perspective, the budget was the highlight of the legislative session as it included significant investments in Arizona's water future. The water-related initiatives in the budget include:

- \$160 million to establish the Drought Mitigation Fund to provide initial investment for large, State-wide water augmentation projects.
- \$46 million to provide long-term loans and grants for water supply development projects in rural Arizona.
- \$100 million to fund emergency wildfire response and mitigation measures to protect our forest watersheds
- \$15 million for the Water Quality Assurance Revolving Fund (WQARF), Arizona's program to clean up contaminated aquifers
- \$6 million for the Water Infrastructure Finance Authority (WIFA) to assist urban, rural, and tribal water providers with infrastructure financing
- \$2.8 million for the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) to attract and retain key personnel critical for overseeing our State's water supplies
- \$2.9 million to assist ADWR and the Superior Court with Arizona's General Stream Adjudications

This historic amount of funding for infrastructure, treatment, management, and protection of our water resources, comes at a crucial time for Arizona as we face a record-setting dry year on the Colorado River, contend with the [management of our aquifers](#) throughout the State, and endure a devastating series of [wildfires](#) that will impact our watershed for years to come. Nevertheless, this significant funding is a positive step forward. It shows our State leaders recognize that it is vital to invest in water and plan for the future during this time of increased uncertainty.

The financial resources created in this legislative session present an opportunity for tangible improvements to water challenges. This is hopefully only the beginning since, as a State, we should be investing annually to develop and protect our water resources. This funding should be paired with management strategies and policies that ensure our water supplies are protected and utilized responsibly. Areas in rural Arizona still face the threat of depleting groundwater resources as pumping continues unabated. In addition, urban areas that have benefited from groundwater regulations still have their share of [opportunities to improve groundwater management](#).

Since the laws and regulations surrounding Arizona's water resources are complicated, it can be challenging to adequately discuss water-related proposals during the legislative session, even in a marathon session like this year. For this reason, AMWUA works year-round to encourage lawmakers and stakeholders to work openly and collaboratively when it comes to water legislation.

Last August, AMWUA partnered with municipal water users from Northern and Southern Arizona to provide legislative candidates with a [Water 101 briefing](#) before the legislative session. AMWUA also partnered with the Agribusiness & Water Council of Arizona to host a series of [Vetting Forums](#) for stakeholders to present their legislative concepts to the water community and receive feedback on their proposals. As a result, most bills brought forth in the Vetting Forum passed through the Legislature with broad bipartisan support, including SB 1147. This is a testament to the value of transparent discussions on these critical issues.

Planning, managing, and investing in our water resources and infrastructure has enabled us to face our current challenges, particularly the pending Colorado River shortage. That is why we must continue those efforts to ensure we can address and manage future challenges with confidence. This year's legislative action and investments in water are a positive step that State leaders will need to build on. In the end, we will all benefit from transparency and collaboration as we strive to develop solutions for the water challenges we face.

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.