

Arizona is third in the nation for statewide conservation policies

The international organization Alliance for Water Efficiency (AWE) has ranked Arizona third in the nation and second in the Colorado River Basin for advancing water efficiency and conservation measures. This recognition validates the proactive conservation programs of water providers in the Phoenix and Tucson areas, including the AMWUA cities, that exceed the state's requirements and have steadily built a strong conservation culture for their communities.



AWE's conservation scorecard is an evaluation of a state's overall water efficiency and sustainability policies. AWE ranked each state in the country based on its adoption and implementation of state-level laws and policies that advance water efficiency, conservation, sustainability, and affordability, focusing on measures related to the residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional sectors.

Arizona's success in conservation can be tied to groundbreaking legislation – the 1980 Groundwater Management Act, which mandates conservation requirements for municipalities in Arizona's most populated areas. Under the Groundwater Management Act, the State implements management plans that require municipalities to increasingly ramp down per capita demand and increase water efficiency.

Arizona's four-decade approach to conservation has had an impact across the state and in the Valley:

- The Phoenix area has seen a cultural shift in landscape preferences over time. In the 1970s, approximately 80% of single-family properties had majority grass landscapes; today, in the City of Phoenix, that number is less than 9%.
- Collectively, the AMWUA cities use roughly the same amount of drinking water today as they did in 2000, despite adding one million residents.
- Large water providers in Arizona must meet conservation regulations, including metering all connections, which is not required or done in other states. The ten AMWUA cities collectively have over 1,065,000 metered connections.
- In addition to meeting the state-mandated conservation requirements, AMWUA cities collectively implement 106 common-sense ordinances such as plumbing efficiency requirements, water waste prohibitions, and limitations on grass.

- In 2020, the AMWUA cities collectively had an average system water loss of only 5.49%, well below the 10% Arizona requirement and the national average of 16%.

In addition to highlighting what the states do well, the Scorecard is encouraging states to take further action through laws and policies to increase conservation. AWE made three recommendations for how Arizona could receive a higher conservation score. However, those recommendations have already been implemented in various ways.

- **Adopt laws and codes for high-efficiency fixtures**
An efficiency standard for plumbing fixtures that are sold in stores has driven per capita water use reductions in Arizona and nationwide. In fact, Arizona had requirements for efficient plumbing fixtures before the federal standards were adopted in 1992. Unfortunately, Arizona's standard has not been updated even though it is arguably one of the easiest and least onerous ways to improve wise water use. Since 2019, AMWUA has encouraged the adoption of statewide these efficiency standards to align with criteria established by the WaterSense Program, a public-private partnership between industry, utilities, and regulators, with proven performance and efficiency requirements. However, the legislation is yet to be passed.
- **Require water rate structures that encourage conservation**
While this is not state-regulated, all of the AMWUA cities and most municipal water providers in Arizona already have a tiered pricing structure to promote efficient water use. While each rate structure may vary, they all use the same principle – pay more for using more.
- **Require coordination between land use and water planning**
Arizona recognized the importance of this decades ago and responded with the 100-Year Assured Water Supply Program. While it's not mandated statewide, it is in the state's most populated areas, significantly impacting how and where we can grow. We recognize that we need to strengthen the Assured Water Supply Program by fixing loopholes to avoid other water crises like what is happening in Rio Verde.

While the national acknowledgment highlights everything that Arizona has done well in conservation and efficiency, everyone who works in water understands that there is still more to do. The AMWUA cities remain committed to continually building upon past and current conservation efforts, which are vital to maximizing the use of their water supplies, especially as we face a future with less Colorado River water.

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