

## **Governor's Water Policy Council tasked with finding policy solutions to water challenges**

With so much focus on the Colorado River, it is critical that we continue to protect and find ways to improve the management of our groundwater supply. Arizona has a proud history of taking proactive and decisive measures to manage groundwater through the 1980 Groundwater Management Act and the 100-year Assured Water Supply Program. Yet, we are not perfect, and there are challenges that require us to continue to protect and find ways to improve the management of our aquifers and our finite groundwater supplies.



A positive step forward was taken last week when various stakeholders, from across the state, including AMWUA, gathered around a table as the [Governor's Water Policy Council](#).

The inaugural gathering began with Governor Hobbs emphasizing there has never been a more critical time to secure and strengthen our water supplies and that these next few years will be critical in Arizona's water history. Careful planning, sound management, and strong leadership create a secure water future. This requires acknowledging problems and weaknesses and then taking action, not just talking about them.

The Governor tasked us, the Council, with making recommendations on how to update, revise and improve groundwater policy in two arenas to ensure that Arizona can continue to thrive.

### **Assured Water Supply Program**

The first focus area for the Council is to review and make recommendations to update the [100-Year Assured Water Supply Program](#), a cornerstone of the [Groundwater Management Act \(GMA\)](#). The Assured Water Supply Program has allowed municipalities within the state's most populated areas to prosper by enabling guided and responsible growth in our arid environment. It protects homebuyers and ensures sustainable growth. No other state in the country can tout such a rigorous requirement. Any changes the Council recommends must strengthen the Program's integrity, protect consumers and aquifers, and ensure future growth is not reliant only on mined groundwater.

Recent groundwater modeling by the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) reinforces the limitations of developing solely on groundwater and shows the challenges that need to be addressed. We have an opportunity to consider ways to evolve and improve the 100-year Assured Water Supply Program as well as close loopholes in the Program. This will send a positive message to Arizona residents, businesses, and the nation that Arizona is

confronting its water challenges and preventing new ones from happening. The vibrant communities and economies of the AMWUA cities are a testament to the benefit and strength of these forward-thinking policies.

### **Rural Groundwater Management**

The second focus area for the Council is rural groundwater. Groundwater will always be a fundamental water source in the desert. In some regions of Arizona, it remains the only water source. Finding improvements to groundwater management is essential to ensuring our state remains prosperous. Currently, there is a minimal framework for managing groundwater outside the AMAs and INAs, despite many of these areas facing significant growth and aquifer depletion. This focus area aims to develop recommendations for water management tools to assist rural Arizona communities in managing their groundwater resources.

Both objectives – improving the Assured Water Supply Program and addressing rural groundwater – are large tasks for the Governor’s Water Policy Council. Yet, finding solutions is vital for Arizona as these challenges will not magically take care of themselves. Failing to safeguard our groundwater supplies is not an option since all water users, communities, and economies will be negatively impacted. Finding solutions that sustain our aquifers will benefit all of us and continue our legacy of wise water stewardship.

Now more than ever, collaboration and cooperation that leads to action are critical to the resiliency of the Valley and Arizona. We cannot dodge or avoid the difficulty of grappling with groundwater issues, and we must make tough decisions and take bold action to ensure our communities can thrive for decades. While bringing water stakeholders together last week was a step in the right direction, there is plenty of work to be done. Still, looking around the table, it was apparent that we all are willing to put in that work and step up to find solutions together, which will benefit us and future generations.

*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](http://www.amwua.org).*