

Saturday, December 27, 2014

Talk of the Town: 2015's water issues

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California has convinced nearly everyone west of the Pecos that the time for long-term water planning is now.

Media coverage of water issues in the Western states has suddenly become thorough, detailed and persistent. The message: although the water problems facing the West are daunting, much can be done if decision-makers agree to make water planning a top priority in 2015.

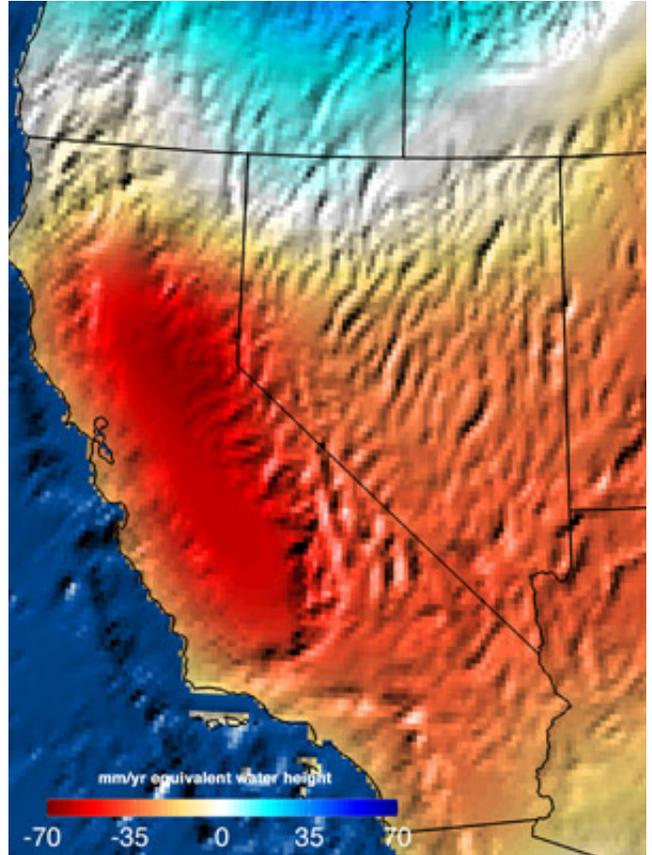
Here is an example of how much momentum is building toward creating new and improved water policy in Arizona: the Morrison Institute for Public Policy at [Arizona State University](#) recently announced that, supported by a \$1M gift from the Morrison family, former U.S. Senator Jon Kyl has been appointed to direct activities at the Kyl Center for Water Policy. Newly-elected Governor Doug Ducey has said he will work closely with Kyl on water planning.

That's good news but, realistically, planning at the state level could take years, if not decades.

In our region, the most important issue is for Yavapai County to resume planning our water future now. The Board of Supervisors (BOS) has effectively dismantled the Water Advisory Committee (WAC), the only countywide forum for water planning, and Yavapai County cities are letting the WAC slip away by not hiring a new coordinator. The WAC coordinated the \$600,000 Central Yavapai Highlands Water Resource Management Study (CYHWRMS), performed in cooperation with other state and federal agencies, to identify potential future sources of water.

CYHWRMS is at a crucial stage. Yavapai County cities need to decide if they want to fund a Feasibility Study (cost: approximately \$5M), but there is no coordination or support from the WAC and the stakeholders currently don't have consensus on whether or how to proceed. CWAG supports doing a Feasibility Study, and we encourage the BOS to create a new, effective water planning process. CWAG will soon present a public program on CYHWRMS to explain the issues.

Locally, the [City of Prescott](#) (COP) has hired a consultant, Herb Dishlip, to study various components of the City's water resources management plan (City Contract No. 2015-008). Mr. Dishlip will analyze the City's plans for importing water from the Big Chino Water Ranch as well as the impact of specific municipal water



In this satellite data image released by NASA JPL/Caltech shows trends in total water storage in California, Nevada and bordering states from NASA's Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (GRACE) satellite mission, Sept. 2011 to Sept. 2014. (AP Photo/NASA JPL/Caltech)

conservation strategies. He will also help COP develop a long-range water management plan, to include water supply and demand projections (both with and without water pumped from the Big Chino Water Ranch). And this long-awaited plan will include a calculation of Prescott's contribution to safe yield, compliance with Proposition 400, and a look at other potential long-term sources of water, such as those considered in CYHWRMS. Although the plan intends to include possible contributions to achieving safe yield, it doesn't satisfy the need for a regional solution.

Management of the water resources in the Big Chino Valley is another major issue. CWAG's primary concern when it comes to how Big Chino aquifer water will be used in the future is the fate of the Upper Verde River.

Unmitigated pumping of Big Chino groundwater will decrease the base flow (groundwater-supplied component of stream flow) in the Upper Verde River (see three comprehensive reports on that issue, prepared by CWAG's Science Committee chair and posted at www.cwagaz.org). CWAG will present two programs in 2015 on land use and potential development on the Big Chino aquifer.

Because we know that any sustainable water management plan must include water conservation, CWAG will continue to work during 2015 to encourage the development of a water conservation ethic in the Prescott Active Management Area. We will be presenting public programs on desalination as well as other technology-driven methods of conserving water, such as reuse.

Beginning the last week of January, CWAG will offer an EPA-grant-supported class titled, "Water Conservation and Environmental Problem Solving." The class goal is to increase leadership capacity for environmental problem solving related specifically to water conservation.

Enrollment in this free class is limited to 30 people. The class will meet in the County Extension Service classroom at the rodeo grounds, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., on Jan. 28, Feb. 4, 11 and 25, Mar. 4 and 14.

Following five lectures on water conservation and related environmental issues presented by highly qualified instructors, students will participate in the hands-on installation of a rainwater harvesting system on Saturday, Mar. 14.

To enroll, email Project Director Donna Putschoegl at twoputschoegl@aol.com.

Please submit your questions and comments to info@cwagaz.org.

Chris Hoy is president of the Citizen's Water Advocacy Group.

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