

The Daily Courier

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Column: Water and the Deep Well Ranch annexation

By LESLIE HOY
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An annexation of 1,625 acres initiated by the City of Prescott is now underway. The land under proposal is part of the James family's Deep Well Ranch.

Citizens packed the room at the Sept. 10 Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Commission annexation hearing, but because P&Z can't consider water in their recommendations to City Council, most water questions went unanswered. Water issues, however, are considered by Council during their approval process. In this column, I will try to address some water aspects of the proposed annexation.

How much water is involved? In 1967, the City agreed to give the James family a virtually unlimited amount of water in exchange for the right to lay the pipe to Prescott's wells in Chino Valley across the James property. In 2009, the City renegotiated the agreement, still promising the James family a generous water reservation in three increments: 450 acre-feet per year (AFY) based on the state's 1999 and 2005 Decision and Orders (D&O), 500 AFY of treated effluent from the 2009 D&O, and another 900 AFY from that D&O contingent on construction of the Big Chino pipeline, for a total of 1,850 AFY. (An acre-foot is approximately 325,851 gallons.) Note that per the agreement, the James family receives the water whether or not the Deep Well land is annexed.

How many people can 1,850 AFY support? When approving an Assured Water Supply for new subdivisions, the Arizona Department of Water Resources uses .35 AFY per household and the City's average household of about two persons; thus, the promised water could support about 11,000 people, representing an approximate 25 percent increase in Prescott's population. Without the 900 AFY from the Big Chino water, there would be enough for about 5,400 people. Other factors, however, could limit the amount of growth.

How will the annexation affect current residents? Withdrawal of the promised 950 AFY from the Little Chino aquifer will increase our overdraft, which is currently 10,000 to 15,000 AFY. Consequences of continued overdraft include more wells going dry, increased pumping and drilling costs, reduced stream flows, and land subsidence.

In 2005 Prescott voters passed Proposition 400 which specifies that for annexations of 250 acres or more, all effluent generated by the annexed area must go to recharge the aquifer and cannot be used as credits for growth. This would mitigate the annexation's effect on the overdraft by about 50 percent. Development in the city, however, could be more rapid and considerably denser than in the county, thus consuming more water overall, despite the requirement for recharge. Our City Council needs to carefully weigh potential water use when deciding whether to annex the Deep Well property.

Citizens should also be aware that AZ Eco Development is planning to propose annexation of 2,471 acres, possibly later this fall. Their plans were incorporated in Prescott's General Plan passed by voters in the August election. Although AZ Eco must "bring their own water rights," some of that water will come from the Little Chino aquifer.

Of course, there are many factors other than water to think about when deciding whether to support or oppose annexation. They include the impact on neighboring subdivisions, schools, police and fire protection, roads, utilities, whether costs will outweigh benefits, and who will pay.

What can you do?

Read the annexation documents at www.prescott-az.gov. Click on the "Deep Well Annexations" box on the right-hand side of the web page.

Attend the public hearings at 3 p.m. on Oct. 6 and Nov. 10 at City Hall.

Submit your comments. Proposition 400 requires City staff to present at the Nov. 10 City Council meeting the public comments received. A link to the comment form is posted with the documents.

What if City Council approves the annexations?

If City Council approves the Deep Well and/or AZ Eco annexations, it will be important to minimize use of potable water for landscaping. The City currently does offer conservation incentives (see the "water conservation" page at www.prescott-az.gov) and great low-water-use landscaping information at prescottwatersmart.com, but landscaping codes for new construction are few and weak.

The voters passed Proposition 400 to increase transparency in the annexation process. The City is following the rules we voted for. We must now do our part and make our voices heard.

The Citizens Water Advocacy Group will have a booth at Prescott's Great Outdoors Oct. 10-11. We invite you to stop by.

Please submit your questions and comments to [info @cwagaz.org](mailto:info@cwagaz.org).

Leslie Hoy is CWAG media coordinator, a founding member, and has lived in Prescott for 16 years.

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