

# The Daily Courier

Saturday, October 31, 2015

## Column: Deep Well Ranch and water use

By JOHN ZAMBRANO  
Special to the Courier

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In her Oct. 5 column about the City's proposed annexation of the Deep Well Ranch, Catherine Sebold, Communications and Public Affairs Manager for the City of Prescott, purported to correct statements in a Sept. 25 column by Leslie Hoy of the Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG). The City's column incorrectly suggested that CWAG opposes the annexation or believes that the annexation will use more water than if development occurred under County zoning.

CWAG has neither taken a position on the annexation nor evaluated the respective water consumptions. Our column was written to provide the public with some basic water information, to highlight the effects of increased water consumption wherever water is taken from our aquifer and to request examination of water issues prior to a vote by Council. A number of the City's assertions warrant a response.

The statement that CWAG did not provide information identifying where wells have gone dry implies that wells are not going dry. The decline of the water table in the Little Chino aquifer is well documented in widely available reports by the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR).

When ADWR issued its Jan. 12, 1999 Decision and Order declaring that the Prescott Active Management Area was no longer at safe yield, the Department dramatically illustrated the seriousness of our declining water table by describing a letter received from a widow who described life with an undependable water supply while caring for her cancer-stricken husband. As she was preparing to go to the funeral home to make arrangements to bury her husband, the water ran dry, leaving her with shampoo in her hair, but no way to rinse it.

Since that Decision and Order, the declines have continued, with the earliest effects seen in the shallower parts of the aquifer such as the western side of Chino Valley. If you talk, as CWAG has, to these homeowners with wells located in the aquifer's alluvial deposits who have had to drill deeper or are hauling water because they are unable or can't afford to drill deeper, the

problem becomes personal.

Similarly, the City's column questioned our lack of a citation for the decline of flows in "actual" streams. Del Rio Springs feeds the Little Chino Creek on its way to the headwaters of the Verde River. Flow from the Springs has declined from about five cubic feet per second in the 1930s to about 0.5 cubic feet per second currently and is projected by ADWR to go completely dry by about 2025. This "actual" stream, just north of Chino Valley on City of Prescott property, was a key feature in the settlement of Prescott. The City's apparent unawareness of this historic stream's flow reduction is remarkable.

Land subsidence is a lowering of the land surface and can occur when the water table declines. Subsidence can damage structures, cause irreparable damage to the aquifer's storage capacity and result in significant economic damage. Land subsidence is a serious problem in other parts of the state and was identified in the 2006 Safe Yield Committee Report of the Groundwater Users Advisory Council as a potential problem for our aquifer. We regret any implication that land depressions have been identified in our area; however,

we need to be concerned for the future.

The City was critical of CWAG's statement that development density, timing and amounts of water consumption could be different for the City and County. We note that until development plans are submitted, which the City has stated will not occur prior to an annexation, no one can predict what the timing, density and water consumption will be. It may be that annexation is beneficial from a water perspective, but the point is that it is preferable to examine population and water consumption estimates prior to the annexation, not after.

The City inexplicably took issue with our use of 0.35 acre-feet per year per single-family residence when calculating that the 1,850 acre-feet per year of water promised to the Deep Well Ranch could result in approximately an 11,000 population increase, but then went on to say the City uses 0.25 plus 0.1 acre-feet per year. There is no difference.

CWAG continues to ask that all water aspects be thoroughly examined, made available to the public and discussed prior to a Council vote on the annexations.

Linda Stitzer of Western Resource Advocates will discuss "Integrating Land Use and Water Planning: Tools to Reduce the Water Footprint of New Development" on Nov. 14. Details at [www.cwagaz.org](http://www.cwagaz.org).

John Zambrano is a member and Past President of CWAG and a retired environmental engineer.

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