

# Column: The water game

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By CHRIS HOY, Special to the Courier

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Over the next few years, our elected officials will be discussing and voting on some very significant water issues that will affect every Prescott citizen, as well as everyone living in the Quad-Cities.

Among these are the Big Chino pipeline, planning and zoning ordinances aimed at limiting outdoor water use, residential and commercial water conservation policy, and a basin-wide sustainable water management plan.

The Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) believes citizens must be “at the table” when decisions about our future water supply are made so that the availability and cost of our water will not be defined solely by influential groups like developers, agriculture and the business sector.

CWAG formed in 2002 to do two things:

- 1) Protect the Upper Verde River’s base flow from excessive groundwater pumping in the Big Chino aquifer.
- 2) Encourage elected officials to create a sustainable water management plan that would halt the declining water table in the Little Chino aquifer.

Fourteen years have gone by and so far there is no sustainable water plan. And, although municipalities have said that they will find a way to protect the upper Verde River’s base flow if the Big Chino Pipeline is built, a mitigation plan has yet to be defined.

CWAG believes that, prior to construction, the Big Chino Pipeline project must include a mitigation plan that will protect the river, as well as an equitable financing plan. In addition, all alternative sources of water should be evaluated before the project is put to a vote (a vote required by Proposition 401 approved by Prescott voters in 2009).

CWAG supports a comprehensive evaluation of economic and environmental factors for all water resource alternatives, including aggressive conservation, direct potable reuse, stormwater recharge and rainwater harvesting. It should be assumed that the best solution will be a combination of alternatives.

CWAG believes that, when it comes to using our limited water resources efficiently, conservation is the low-hanging fruit. We are striving to educate citizens about all the techniques available to them for conserving water – both indoors and outdoors.

And we support planning and zoning ordinances that would require new construction (both residential and commercial) to limit pumping groundwater for landscaping, and encourage rainwater harvesting and the use of native plants.

CWAG also believes that creating a sustainable water management plan should be a priority for all Prescott Active Management Area stakeholders and said plan must be agreed upon no later than 2025, the deadline for “safe yield” set by the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR). No agreement has been reached so far that will stabilize the declining water table in the Little Chino aquifer without reducing the base flow in the upper Verde River.

CWAG would like to see Yavapai County and the City of Prescott reinstitute water conservation committees (citizens, businesses, government) that will review current water conservation incentives, recommend regulatory changes, discuss and analyze innovative ideas, and promote water conservation in every way possible.

At the CWAG public meeting on Oct. 8, CWAG board member and hydrologist Wayne Hood, R.G. and CWAG president Chris Hoy will review “headline” water issues – past, present and future. Everyone will find this summary of important water issues and events valuable, particularly people who are new to this area.

The “headline” topics list includes the declaration in 1999 by ADWR that the Prescott Active Management Area was out of “safe yield” and the AMA communities would no longer be able to pump Little Chino Aquifer groundwater for new construction; the subsequent “plat rush” and the purchase of a water ranch on the Big Chino aquifer in anticipation of building a pipeline to be used to import groundwater; Propositions 400 and 401, initiated by citizens, both significant modifications to local water regulations; and possible solutions now under discussion, including a water management district.

During the next several years, city officials will make decisions that affect how much water you use and what you pay for it. Let your voice be heard. As the saying goes, “If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu.”

Chris Hoy and Wayne Hood, R.G. will discuss “Regional Water Issues – Past, Present and Future” when CWAG meets on Saturday, Oct. 8 from 10 a.m. to noon at the Granite Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation building, 882 Sunset in Prescott (two blocks behind True Value). The program will conclude with audience Q&A.

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

Chris Hoy is president of the Citizens Water Advocacy Group.