

# Column: Whatever happened to safe yield?

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In 2007 the Citizen's Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) board of directors approved this position about the future formation of a regional water district: "CWAG encourages the development of a district or districts in order to help reach safe yield in the Prescott Active Management Area and to preserve the flow of the Upper Verde River."

When the state announced in 1999 that the Prescott Active Management Area (PrAMA) was mining groundwater, the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) imposed Assured Water Supply Rules to achieve the goal of safe yield by 2025. Safe yield means that we have achieved a balance between groundwater being pumped from our aquifer and water that nature and we put back into the aquifer. (CWAG advocates that outflows of 5,000 acre-feet-per-year should be established as part of the safe yield goal in order to maintain recent flows in springs and streams).

Some of the consequences of continuously mining groundwater include wells going dry, the loss of Del Rio Springs (a landmark feature in the history of this region), water quality problems, and the possibility of land fissures.

Officials in the PrAMA began to conduct meetings to try to come up with an acceptable safe yield strategy. They were unable to reach agreement. One frustrated elected official stated that what was needed was a "water czar" with the authority to design, fund and implement an effective safe yield plan.

In 2008, the Upper Verde River Watershed Protection Coalition Board, which included representatives from Prescott, Yavapai County, Prescott Valley, the Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe and Chino Valley, appointed a Safe Yield Workgroup to develop a plan that would enable the PrAMA to reach safe yield by 2025.

In 2010, the Safe Yield Workgroup reported that the Coalition, as a voluntary group with limited funding and authority, would "struggle" to reach the objective of safe yield. They predicted that the overdraft (estimated to be 11,000 acre-feet-per-year in 2010 – enough to support 40,000 to 50,000 households) would increase when new groundwater pumping occurred to satisfy water demand created when approved, but not yet developed, subdivisions were finally built. The Workgroup's forecast of increased water demand also included future exempt wells, new commercial/industrial users and more.

The Workgroup recommended formation of a "jurisdictional" organization with specific regulatory and funding authority. They suggested a Replenishment District that, with legislative approval, would have bonding authority, binding membership, and the ability to operate/manage large operations.

It is now 2017 and there is not yet a "jurisdictional" authority working to achieve safe yield. Demand for groundwater continues to increase. The year 2025 looms. It is time for the Coalition to initiate the actions that will result in the creation of a jurisdictional organization that can find a solution for the safe yield problem.

On Sept. 9, former CWAG president John Zambrano and former Verde River Basin Partnership chair Ed Wolfe will answer your water questions at the CWAG meeting. Submit questions to [info@cwagaz.org](mailto:info@cwagaz.org). Details at [www.cwagaz.org](http://www.cwagaz.org).

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