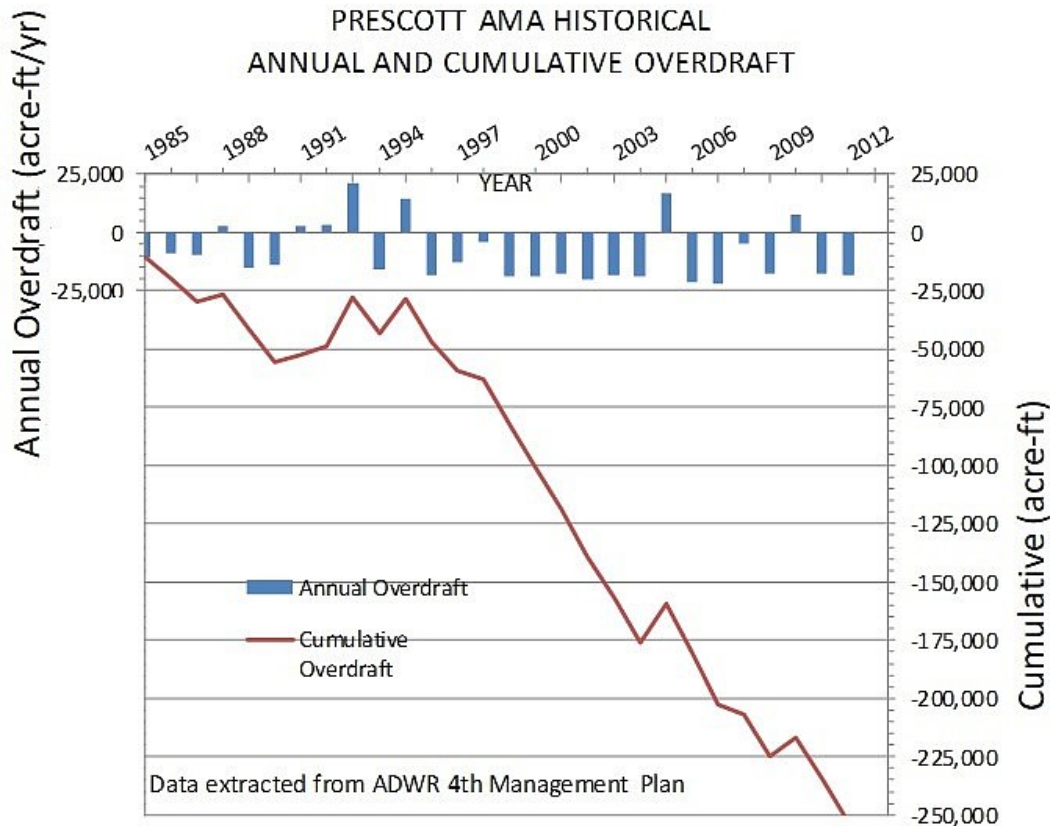


Wolfe: Four cities, some neighbors, one aquifer: A cautionary tale

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Ed Wolfe, Ph.D., Special to the Courier

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A metaphor: Visualize a small group of hikers, lost in the desert with their only water source an open basin of water. They welcome additional stragglers, thinking greater numbers are good. They all hope for replenishing rain. Some rain comes at times but never enough to provide an assured long-term water supply. The end of the tale is painful.

Groundwater from the Prescott Active Management Area (PrAMA) is our major source of water, supporting the needs of the citizens of Prescott, Prescott Valley, Chino Valley, Dewey-Humboldt and unincorporated parts of the PrAMA. This groundwater supplied 82 percent of the water consumed within the PrAMA in 2012, the latest year for which we have data. We are dependent on our groundwater, and we are pumping too much. We are in the process of draining our aquifer.

The state-mandated water-management goal for the PrAMA is safe yield — maintenance of long-term balance between the annual amount of groundwater withdrawn from the aquifer and the annual amount of natural and human-directed return of water to the aquifer. Failure to meet safe yield produces overdraft — the volume of depletion of the groundwater stored in the aquifer. The overdraft was more

than 18,000 acre-feet for 2012 (visualize a column of water more than a half-mile high standing on the courthouse plaza). The overdraft totaled more than 250,000 acre-feet (a column of water nearly 8 miles high on the plaza) for the period 1985 through 2012. We have been in relative drought since the mid-1990s, and the overdraft has undoubtedly grown since 2012. The eventual end of our tale could be painful.

Please join us as the Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) hosts a forum on water issues at 10 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 3, at the Granite Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation building. Forum participants, all up for election in the Aug. 27 primary, are City of Prescott candidates: Mayor Greg Mengarelli, who is running unopposed for re-election, and four candidates for three open Prescott City Council seats. The City Council candidates are Cathey Rusing, who is running for her first term, and incumbents Jim Lamerson, Billie Orr and Steve Sischka.

We will explore our region's most important water issues:

- Safe yield versus overdraft.
- Water conservation policy.
- Consideration of long-range sustainability action plans as tools for helping to assure water-supply health in perpetuity.
- The threatened loss of year-round flow of the upper Verde River from potential actions in the Big Chino Valley — expanded irrigation, population growth, exportation of water and the proposed pumped storage project.

We expect it will be apparent that our long-term water health is critically dependent on collaboration among our four municipalities and Yavapai County. Details including the questions to be explored are available at cwagaz.org under "Current Issues."

Let's avoid a painful end to our tale.

Please send your questions or comments to info@cwagaz.org.

Edward W. Wolfe, Ph.D., is chairman of the CWAG Education Committee, former chair of the Verde River Basin Partnership, and a retired USGS geologist.