

Let's put stormwater to work!

May 7, 2023



By GORDON BOND

One-third of all groundwater pumped from our aquifer each year is for seasonal landscaping. If we are going to make progress in stabilizing our rapidly declining aquifer, we must substantially reduce the use of groundwater for landscaping.

One way to reduce landscape water use is to capture stormwater before it runs down the street where it provides little or no benefit. Relatively simple projects — sometimes termed passive rainwater harvesting — can often be set up by individual homeowners, or by a neighborhood, or by parking lot owners or other property owners. Together, these collective efforts are known as community water stewardship. It will take the efforts of all of us to contribute to long-term water security.

Passive rainwater harvesting projects can include creation of swales, which are small ditches to guide water. These can be on a property or by the side of the road to capture street runoff. They can also include “rain gardens,” small basins that capture stormwater and contain native flowers to brighten a yard or the neighborhood. While every home and every street may not be suitable for stormwater-capture projects, opportunities exist for creative solutions to local situations. See “Rainwater Harvesting and Water Budget” under “Current Issues” at cwagaz.org .

Prescott and Prescott Valley leaders are faced with the reality that their water utilities must be scaled to distribute twice as much groundwater in peak summer months as in winter months. And they are aware that a good portion of this is caused by excessive landscape water use. Prescott has in place — and Prescott Valley is contemplating — a program of measures to encourage reduced use of groundwater for landscape irrigation as part of an overall water-conservation program.

Prescott’s Water Conservation website (prescottwater.com) contains a wide range of information about the city’s conservation incentive program. There is a Rainwater Harvesting Rebate, which can fund up to \$500 for a rain garden project that harvests rainwater.

The Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) is encouraged to see the municipalities in our region putting in place commitments to encourage water conservation. Unfortunately, simply having a robust water conservation program without an equally robust campaign to increase awareness and participation will greatly limit the effectiveness of the program in reducing landscape water use.

To recap, we are dependent on our aquifer and a major cause of its current annual depletion is landscape water use. Diverting and capturing stormwater at the homeowner and neighborhood level is one area for conserving water that is gaining increased attention.

Catlow Shipek from the Watershed Management Group will show us new and established stormwater management techniques for “Fostering Community Water Stewardship” via Zoom on Saturday, May 13 from 10 a.m. to noon. The Zoom registration link is posted under “Next Event” at www.cwagaz.org.

Gordon Bond is a retired business consultant and a member of CWAG’s Executive Committee.