

Beverly: Prescott gushes water policies, ignores future water security Talk of the Town

 [dcourier.com/news/2019/jun/24/beverly-prescott-gushes-water-policies-ignores-fut](https://www.dcourier.com/news/2019/jun/24/beverly-prescott-gushes-water-policies-ignores-fut)

The dam has burst. After years of prodding by the Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG), the City of Prescott is flooding us with new data, two studies and several new planned policies.

This deluge may be good news, but CWAG is concerned that the details are not yet known and that the city is ignoring regional responsibilities. Further, CWAG sees potential errors and omissions in the new policies.

Recent reports to the city from paid consultants suggest that:

- Water use for a growing population will be supplied by reduced water use by current residents.
- Landscape water use would be a major target for conservation efforts.
- Prescott's population could grow to exceed 80,000 by relying on current "legally available water" supplies, without the Big Chino pipeline.

At the June 11 Council Study Session, city staff announced new general policies, without details, that would amend the landscape code, expand the city's utility service area and require sewer connections in order to accumulate wastewater credits.

Staff also announced long overdue updates to the city's water conservation incentive program.

The Dishlip, Woodard and Halstead (June 11) presentations were solely focused on the city without recognizing that Prescott is a part of the Prescott Active Management Area (PrAMA), along with Chino Valley, Prescott Valley, Dewey-Humboldt and unincorporated Yavapai County. The PrAMA goal is safe yield (long-term balance between water removed from the aquifer and water returned to the aquifer) by 2025, but neither a plan to achieve safe yield, nor regional discussions about a plan, currently exist.

The responsibility for achieving safe yield lies with the municipalities and Yavapai County, not with CWAG (as implied by some City Council members). CWAG believes that regional cooperation on water planning and conservation is required and should be part of the city's new policies.

Prescott's new water policies ignore its regional responsibility to reduce the overdraft to zero. The new policies are concerned only with "legally available water" (paper water existing only in state water law)

There are over 16,000 new homes slated to be supplied by this paper water, which is not sustainable and will increase the overdraft in the PrAMA.

The Arizona Department of Water Resources last reported the overdraft in 2012 as over 18,000 acre-feet per year (enough to fill a football field 3 1/2 miles deep), and it will surely grow. Despite the overdraft, new homes will receive "legally available water." That's Arizona Water Law for you.

Under the proposed new policies, the public will be urged to conserve and possibly to support expensive new infrastructure projects to provide for future development. Water policy should be developed with community participation, not behind closed doors. Announcements at a study session are not adequate transparency.

Early public input and participation are essential if public policy is to be effective and successful.

CWAG will host a forum on water issues for Prescott City Council candidates from 10 a.m. to noon Saturday, Aug. 3. Details at www.cwagaz.org. Please send your questions or comments to info@cwagaz.org.

Gary Beverly, Ph.D., is president of the Citizens Water Advocacy Group and a retired business owner working to protect the Verde River.