

Talk of the Town: Our threatened water supply; all must contribute to solutions

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It has been repeated countless times that our region has a limited water supply, that we're pumping four times more than is being replenished, and that each new house, no matter how efficient it is, uses — and loses — yet more water.

Solutions to these problems must come from everyone who plays a role in managing our water supply.

Most importantly, we must hold our elected officials at the state, county and municipal levels to account. They are responsible for groundwater management in their jurisdictions. But we also have to hold ourselves accountable for the water use in our homes and outdoor landscapes.

Let's look first at elected officials at the state level. Our representatives have ignored dealing with the loopholes in current laws that allow more new developments that worsen the situation.

SOLUTION: We just elected state representatives for our area and they must push the legislature to pass meaningful protections for groundwater in the Quad-Cities region and across the state.

At the town and city level, which accounts for two-thirds of our region's population, we see Prescott Valley and Prescott pumping four times the volume of groundwater compared to the volume of processed wastewater they are returning to the aquifer. This means that around three-fourths of all the groundwater they pump is lost to our water supply. Unfortunately, their conservation programs are not targeted to reducing this huge volume of lost water.

SOLUTION: Mayors and city council members in Prescott and Prescott Valley must first acknowledge the volume of water pumped and not returned to the aquifer in their jurisdictions. Then, they can set reasonable objectives to reduce this annual loss to our aquifer and design conservation programs to meet these objectives.

Prescott and Prescott Valley officials are also on a course of providing water to thousands of new homes, which will increase the depletion of our aquifer even more.

SOLUTION: With urgency, Prescott and Prescott Valley must support the requirement for new developments to be based on a "water-neutral" design concept. With development infrastructure optimally designed to capture and recharge stormwater, new developments can offset the depletion of our aquifer.

At the county level, the Board of Supervisors should investigate the extent to which

they are allowed to implement measures similar to those recommended for municipalities.

Homeowners account for the largest proportion of water use in towns, cities, and the county. And residential water use doubles during the summer months, accounting for about a third of all homeowner water use due primarily to outdoor landscaping watering.

SOLUTION: Individual homeowners should assess their own situations and identify an action plan to reduce water use over the next five years. In older homes owners should consider the replacement of inefficient, pre-1994 toilets and other appliances as well as replacing turf with drought-tolerant landscaping.

The Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) actively contributes to these solutions through our education programs, by reaching out to elected officials, and by maintaining a website — cwagaz.org — that is packed with useful information. We invite concerned citizens to join us as we work to achieve a secure water future.

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