

# The Daily Courier

Monday, August 06, 2012

## Talk of the Town: Water is an important election issue

By Howard Mechanic

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Citizens may not think that water is among the important issues for our county supervisors. After all, unlike jurisdictions such as Prescott and Prescott Valley, the county is not a water provider.

Due to our continuing depletion of groundwater, our regional economy and quality of life are threatened. Our county supervisors must act to safeguard our water supply and water-dependent natural resources.

The Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) has invited candidates from District 1 (most of Prescott) and District 4 (north Prescott, Williamson Valley, and Chino Valley) to attend our Aug. 11 candidate forum to discuss the following questions.

**Adequate Water Supply:** Currently, new subdivisions can be built in Yavapai County outside of the Prescott Active Management Area (PrAMA) and the Village of Clarkdale without having an Adequate (100-year) Water Supply or without even an evaluation of water supply adequacy. These subdivisions risk having insufficient water for their wells and depleting the wells of neighbors.

A 2007 state law, SB 1575, allows county supervisors, by unanimous vote, to institute a county-wide requirement that all new subdivisions have an Adequate Water Supply. If you are elected, would you vote for the Adequate Water Supply requirement for all new subdivisions as allowed by the law? What arguments would you use to convince your fellow supervisors to take the same position?

**A Plan to Reach Safe Yield:** The PrAMA, which is wholly within Yavapai County, was declared out of safe yield in 1999, 13 years ago. The state has set the year 2025 as the goal for achieving safe yield, a mere 13 years from now. Our overdraft has grown to approximately 14,000 acre-feet per year, and the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) predicts that unless strong action is taken, the overdraft could reach 20,000 acre-feet per year by 2025.

Wells in the shallow parts of the aquifer have gone dry and more will go dry as the water table continues its decline. Wells must be drilled deeper or water must be hauled. ADWR predicts Del Rio Springs will go dry by 2025. A declining water table puts us at risk for ground subsidence. The financial and quality of life losses to citizens and the county will be substantial.

Our common water supply requires an AMA-wide plan wherein all users share responsibility to achieve safe yield. If you are elected:

1. How would you go about working with the water users in the AMA to develop a plan to achieve safe yield?
2. Would you support a district to administer a program to achieve safe yield?
3. What other ideas do you have for achieving safe yield with each government entity making a fair contribution?

Verde River Flow: Studies by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (1994), ADWR (2000) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS, 2005) have concluded that withdrawing water from the Big Chino aquifer will reduce flow in the Verde River. Independent private and government scientists have affirmed this determination in meetings, newspaper interviews and under oath. The recently developed USGS numerical model (2011) predicts further declines in the Verde River with increased pumping. Do you accept that pumping in the Big Chino aquifer will reduce flow in the Verde River? Why or why not, and on what scientific study or expert opinions do you base your thinking?

Verde River Protection: Private lands in the Big Chino Valley could support over 50,000 homes. Because the Big Chino Valley is the largest area in the county where development can take place, there is a good chance that large-scale development in fact will take place and affect the flow of the Verde River.

1. Should the Board of Supervisors encourage large-scale development by putting in roads and other infrastructure in the Big Chino Valley?
2. Should the Board of Supervisors support a water management plan for the Big Chino Valley?
3. What measures would you support to protect the flow in the upper Verde River?

Voters may want to ask the candidates these or similar questions in other venues. Readers are invited to attend CWAG's forum on Saturday, Aug. 11 from 10 a.m. to noon at the Granite Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation building, 882 Sunset in Prescott (two blocks behind True Value). Candidates will be available to chat at 9:30 a.m. and after the forum. For more info, call 445-4218, email [info@cwagaz.org](mailto:info@cwagaz.org), or visit <http://www.cwagAZ.org>.

(Howard Mechanic is chair of the Public Policy Committee of the Citizens Water Advocacy Group).

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