

# The Daily Courier

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## Talk of the Town: CWAG celebrates 10 years and counting

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In May, 2002, the Verde River Citizens Alliance (VRCA) organized a field trip to the scenic headwaters of the Verde River. The late Laurie Wirt, hydrologist for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Denver office, came along to collect water samples from the Verde River springs and Kay Lauster, a Chino Valley resident who often camped near the river, was there to help her.

When the two women paused to share lunch on the banks of the river, they began to chat about the fact that the VRCA was an important and very active "East side of Mingus Mountain" citizens group, dedicated to protecting and preserving the Verde River from a variety of threats. But there was no comparable "West side of Mingus Mountain" citizens group. That conversation prompted Ms. Lauster to ask the VRCA "East" members present that day if they would help her put together a VRCA "West."

Over the next several months, members of the VRCA "East," Ms. Lauster and local volunteers created a steering committee, pondered various organizational strategies, and developed mission and vision statements. Somewhere along the way the steering committee changed its working name from VRCA West to Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG).

The CWAG steering committee (chaired by Kay Lauster, who would become CWAG's first president), turned its attention to organizing a public water forum. The forum convened on Oct. 12, 2002 at the Watson Lake Park Pavilion and was titled "A Citizens Workshop: Local Water Trends, the Past, Present and Future of Water."

Nearly 100 people attended the forum. Speakers included George Howard, warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Flagstaff, who said we could be facing a prolonged period of drought; Jim Holt, then director, Arizona Department of Water Resources in the Prescott Active Management Area, who said that we could not achieve the mandated goal of safe yield (a balance between the amount of water removed from an aquifer and the amount put back in) without importing water from another source; Laurie Wirt, USGS hydrologist, who discussed water resources as well as surface/groundwater interaction; and Tom O'Halleran, then state representative for District 1, who talked about water sustainability in our region. The forum received front page coverage in the Oct. 15 Daily Courier.

A week after the forum, a follow-up meeting attracted a highly motivated group of people. They created a list of priorities and continued to work at resolving complex organizational issues. The first official meeting of CWAG took place on Nov. 9, 2002, at the Granite Peak Unitarian Universalist

Congregation building (GPUU).

CWAG gained valuable momentum with the Tri-City Water Forum in November, 2003, co-sponsored with the League of Women Voters of Central Yavapai County and the Verde Watershed Association. The well-attended forum was held at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and its stated goal was: "To convey the importance of water issues in the Upper Verde Watershed and how water management affects the ecosystem and our quality of life."

Today, CWAG has a board of directors, two standing committees (Public Policy and Education), 122 dues-paying members and almost 600 people who subscribe to our two electronic publications - a monthly calendar of water-related meetings/events and a "News and Views" newsletter focused on water issues. Our public meetings, held on the second Saturday of the month at the GPUU Congregation building (882 Sunset, two blocks behind True Value Hardware) are videotaped for later viewing on Access13 and on our website.

CWAG has an active speakers bureau, dozens of free printed scientific reports, maps and water essays, and a robust information-rich website ([www.cwagaz.org](http://www.cwagaz.org)). CWAG members attend and participate in virtually every important water meeting in this region. We also write a monthly column for the Daily Courier.

We believe what CWAG has been doing for the past ten years - educating the public about water issues and assisting elected officials to better manage this crucial scarce resource - is important. In the coming decade, we will strive to maintain our reputation as a nonpartisan water information resource, give a voice to citizen interests, ensure government accountability and help decision-makers in any way we can to develop an effective water management plan for our region. If you would like to help us work toward a more secure water future, visit our website to learn how you can become a CWAG member.

Landscape architect Barnabas Kane will provide examples of water-efficient landscaping on Nov. 18 at the [Prescott Public Library](#). Details at [www.cwagaz.org](http://www.cwagaz.org).

Chris Hoy is chair of the CWAG Education Committee.

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