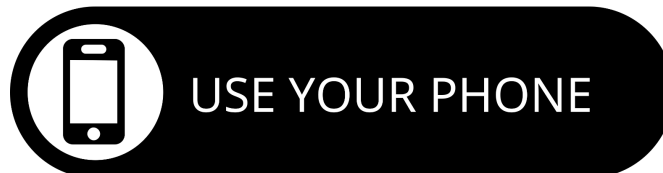


Willcox Basin Informational Packet

courtesy of Cochise Groundwater Stewards

Contact: cochisegroundwaterstewards@gmail.com

Additional resources here:



May 7, 2024

Honorable Governor Katie Hobbs
Members of the Legislature
1700 W. Washington St. Arizona State Capitol Complex
Phoenix, AZ 85007

RE: Let's Find Workable Groundwater Solutions for Rural Arizona

Dear Governor Hobbs and Members of the Legislature,

We are all residents of the Willcox Basin or neighbors within Cochise County who depend on the groundwater here to sustain our lives and our homes. We write to ask you to address the serious groundwater challenges we face here by first disposing of Senate Bill 1221, an unworkable and unreasonable "non-solution", a proposal that would actually be a hindrance to resolving our dire groundwater challenges in Cochise County.

The Willcox groundwater basin is the "poster child" for Arizona's rural groundwater crisis, with an overdraft of more than 3 times the natural recharge as identified in a recent Arizona Department of Water Resources Supply and Demand Study. As of 2018, the average depth to water has dropped below the average well depth – resulting in tremendous hardship for many rural residents.

Some homeowners might be able to afford to deepen their wells at significant cost. But for others, the money has run out. Many now have to haul water to their homes at a much higher monthly expense. Many have lost property value and we have watched friends move away because they lost their water supply. All of this comes from extreme, unfettered over-pumping without any groundwater protections to speak of.

For years, we have pleaded for meaningful groundwater tools that protect our property while supplying water for responsible agricultural growers in our community. Legislators from both parties have introduced workable bills throughout the years. And yet, those bills were never heard in committee. Instead, we are here today because of a different bill—SB1221—a bill that is not supported by rural Arizonans because it will not help folks like us in the Willcox Basin and other rural basins with high overdrafts. Instead it dooms us to continued depletion of our only water source.

The bill is littered with policy, substance and implementation issues. Here are just a few of those problems:

1. The requirements to create a Basin Management Area (BMA) include unreasonable hydrological thresholds, an ambiguous cost benefit analysis, and unanimous Board of Supervisors votes that are likely to block any rural groundwater basin from actually creating a BMA. In the case of the Willcox Basin the Boards of Supervisors from both Cochise and Graham Counties would both have to approve a BMA with unanimous votes..
2. A BMA establishes a certificate of water rights for current users coupled with a system of water debits and credits with no metering requirements or public disclosure – a sure recipe for fraud and

abuse. To make matters worse these water credits can be sold to the highest bidder potentially exposing our community to an even greater risk of groundwater speculation.

3. SB1221 does nothing to ensure that new and replacement well locations do not harm other users or harm the aquifer.
4. The only opportunity to actually reduce the groundwater overdraft in a BMA is through the establishment of an Active Basin Management Area but this step could only happen in the Willcox Basin after unanimous votes from the Boards of Supervisors from both Cochise and Graham Counties followed by an election of eligible voters. Even in the unlikely case where an Active Basin Management Area is created, SB1221 requires any groundwater management decisions, including reductions in groundwater pumping, be approved through unanimous agreement of the five member Active BMA Council. The unanimous vote requirement is likely to result in little or no meaningful action.
5. SB1221 would give outsiders a veto over decisions in Active Basin Management Councils by requiring unanimous votes and letting irrigation districts outside of the Willcox Basin appoint council members. An outside irrigation district is not appropriate to be the decider of our water future.
6. SB1221 requires that any required reductions in groundwater pumping be capped at 10% over the lifetime of the BMA. In the Willcox Basin, the average depth to water is already greater than the average well depth. A 10% reduction will not even move the needle on our overdraft.
7. Addressing the current overdraft here will take a sustained long term effort over many decades but SB1221 would make a long term steady and sustained plan nearly impossible to implement. Under the bill an active BMA would be terminated after 10 years unless the Active BMA Council votes unanimously to call another election and voters approve the continuation. If continuation is not approved, any required irrigation reductions will be terminated and likely the overdraft only gets worse.

It's frustrating that such a flawed proposal as SB1221 continues to move through the legislative process when other more reasonable proposals have never been granted a hearing over the past four years. We believe that SB1221 is such a problematic piece of legislation that it needs to be stopped or vetoed and that a serious dialogue toward a better solution must move forward.

It is time for our political leaders to set aside partisan differences, come together, and address the serious groundwater challenges across rural Arizona. The need is urgent – our water future depends on your actions today!

Respectfully submitted by the following 176 Willcox Basin Residents and 37 Cochise County neighbors,

Steve Kisiel, Pearce,AZ	John Graffio, Pearce, AZ
Lucia Kisiel, Pearce, AZ	Edward Clutter, Pearce, AZ
Sandy Fino, Pearce, AZ	Kay Clutter, Pearce, AZ
Robert Fino, Pearce, AZ	Chris Brinkmeyer, Willcox, AZ
Teresa Weisser, Willcox,AZ	Victoria Brand, Pearce, AZ
Michael Weisser, Willcox, AZ	Jeffrey Brand, Pearce, AZ
Mark Jorve, Willcox, AZ	Gerald A. Beckwith, Pearce, AZ
Rhona MacMillan, Willcox, AZ	James A. Verner, Pearce, AZ
Deborah Hawk, Cochise, AZ	Maria Rosa Andrade Torres Verner, Pearce, AZ

Cheryl Knott, Pearce, AZ	Jessica Dilworth, Pearce, AZ
Karen Bogner, Pearce, AZ	Elaine Santo, Pearce, AZ
Andrew Lang, Pearce, AZ	Glenn Klingler, Cochise, AZ
Katherine Brown, Cochise, AZ	Martha Klingler, Cochise, AZ
Terrence Kleber, Pearce, AZ	Denise Greene, Pearce, AZ
Dianne Kleber, Pearce, AZ	Gayle Colopy, Pearce, AZ
Debra Warner, Pearce, AZ	Karen Sartain, Pearce, AZ
Jessica Jones, Pearce, AZ	Jeff Sartain, Pearce, AZ
Lynn Engstrom, Cochise, AZ	Lou Manuta, Pearce, AZ
Moirra Hagerlin, Pearce, AZ	Janet Manuta, Pearce, AZ
Vince Hagerlin, Pearce, AZ	James E. Syme, Pearce, AZ
Lisa Glenn, Willcox, AZ	Cindi Mapes, Pearce, AZ
Lloyd Glenn, Willcox, AZ	Mary Ford, Dragoon, AZ
Mark LeVine, Willcox, AZ	Stuart Carter, Willcox, AZ
Laurette LeVine, Willcox, AZ	Sarah K. Carter, Willcox, AZ
Tracy Caras, Dragoon, AZ	Dave Middleton, Pearce, AZ
Pete Caras, Dragoon, AZ	Deanna Pihl, Pearce, AZ
Anneke Mayer, Dragoon, AZ	Mark Spencer, Pearce, AZ
Lowell Neff, Dragoon, AZ	Stefanie Spencer, Pearce, AZ
Marc Boutte, Dragoon, AZ	Judy Bernard, Pearce, AZ
Ron Wendelin, Dragoon, AZ	Jeff Bernard, Pearce, AZ
Becky Heckman, Dragoon, AZ	Tom Spierings, Pearce, AZ
Greg Freeman, Pearce, AZ	Angela Rossman, Pearce, AZ
John Arbuthnot, Willcox, AZ	Damon Bostrom, Pearce, AZ
Ellen Cohen, Dragoon, AZ	Dan Clark, Dragoon, AZ
Mike Hensley, Dragoon, AZ	Mary Alice Clark, Dragoon, AZ
Sharon K. Arthur, Pearce, AZ	Jeanie Mudd, Pearce, AZ
Dave Buchanan, Pearce, AZ	Joanna Seeley, Pearce, AZ
Donna Schmelzla, Willcox, AZ	Gregor Caughey, Pearce, AZ
Irbie Wylie, Cochise, AZ	Megan Gesell, Cochise, AZ
Ekan Thomason, Dragoon, AZ	Scott Gesell, Cochise, AZ
Gary Frank Brown, Pearce, AZ	Aimee Myers, Pearce, AZ
Donna Fields Brown, Pearce, AZ	Melinda Kate Brooks, Willcox, AZ
Kathryn Maddox, Pearce, AZ	Jim Domini, Dragoon, AZ
Angela Goodacre, Dragoon, AZ	Johnny Fleischman, Cochise, AZ
John Miller, Dragoon, AZ	Michael J. Drougas, Pearce, AZ
Paul Runner, Pearce, AZ	Susan Drougas, Pearce, AZ
Kathy Shopa, Willcox, AZ	Justin Horn, Pearce, AZ
Michael Shopa, Willcox, AZ	Danielle Horn, Pearce, AZ
Eric Kaldahl, Dragoon, AZ	Jeff Owens, Dragoon, AZ
Tricia Messinger, Cochise, AZ	Michael T. Buck, Cochise, AZ
Eric L. Messinger, Cochise, AZ	Kaylene, Buck, Cochise, AZ
Gary Sands, Dragoon, AZ	Tammy Stansberry, Willcox, AZ
Sherry Sands, Dragoon, AZ	Jessica Helene Stanley, Cochise, AZ
Fred W. Skillman, Cochise, AZ	William James McElroy, Cochise, AZ
Carol M. Skillman, Cochise, AZ	Joanne Wiener, Cochise, AZ
Robin Peterson, Pearce, AZ	Timothy G. Austin, Cochise, AZ

Berta Margarita Acosta, Cochise, AZ	Pat Vicario, Pearce, AZ
Patty Sacco, Pearce, AZ	Jeanie Vicario, Pearce, AZ
Dan Sacco, Pearce, AZ	JoAnne P. Richardson, Pearce, AZ
Sam Klein, Pearce, AZ	Kent Andrew Shaver, Willcox, AZ
Caila Block, Peace, AZ	Nora Jean Shaver, Willcox, AZ
Michael Nelson, Willcox, AZ	Shannon Brown, Willcox, AZ
Carrie Jones, Pearce, AZ	Johna Ward, Pearce, AZ
Jason Jones, Pearce, AZ	Traci Page, Pearce, AZ
Rona Baker, Pearce, AZ	Robert W. Weston, Cochise, AZ
Gary Baker, Pearce, AZ	Judith P. Weston, Cochise, AZ
Ioanna Dactu, Pearce, AZ	Janna Clark, Pearce, AZ
Stanford Collins, Pearce, AZ	Carol J. Lukensmeyer, Pearce, AZ
Karla F. Nelson, Willcox, AZ	Tina M. Samples-Ewer, Dagoon, AZ
Leon R. Nelson, Willcox, AZ	Karen Weilacher, Cochise, AZ
Greg Stotts, Pearce, AZ	Sharon Hill, Willcox, AZ
Claudia Lunden, Cochise, AZ	Michael Hubbard, Willcox, AZ
Joan Edelman, Willcox, AZ	Kari Daniels, Pearce, AZ
Lisa Kramme, Willcox, AZ	Kay Nelson, Willcox, AZ
Janet Randall, Willcox, AZ	Glenna Brooks, Willcox, AZ
Loren Herring, Willcox, AZ	Jeff Haozous, Cochise, AZ
Deborah Herring, Willcox, AZ	Susan Houser, Cochise, AZ
Melanie Lawrence, Cochise, AZ	James A. Kelley, Cochise, AZ
James Zachary Jones, Pearce, AZ	Jody Telfair Richards, Pearce, AZ
Lora Chiehowsky, Pearce, AZ	Janice E. Henning, Pearce, AZ
Luke Zachary Jones Chiehowsky, Pearce, AZ	Carol Osgrove, Pearce, AZ
Robert B. Young, Pearce, AZ	William Bates, Willcox, AZ
Joni Nomides, Pearce, AZ	Vance Williams, Pearce, AZ
Alexis Nomides, Pearce, AZ	Billie Jo Cross, Pearce, AZ
Mary Ford, Dagoon, AZ	Joy Jaqua, Pearce, AZ
Gary L. Taylor, Willcox, AZ	Maria P. Taylor, Willcox, AZ
Robert Maxwell Jarrett, Willcox, AZ	Mary Jo Riley, Cochise, AZ
Lenora M. Setterstedt-Jarrett, Willcox, AZ	Jeff Riley, Cochise, AZ

Cochise County Neighbors Supporting the Willcox Basin

Harry Wolters, Bisbee, AZ	Hunter Mann, Douglas, AZ
Michael Gregory, McNeal, AZ	Diana LaMar, Douglas, AZ
Steve Helffrich, Douglas, AZ	M. Barbara Batey, McNeal, AZ
Alice Hamers, McNeal, AZ	Andrew Walter, Benson, AZ
Allison Morse, Portal, AZ	Jim Liston, Benson, AZ
Dirk Sigler, Portal, AZ	Kris Liston, Benson, AZ
Joy Banks, Huachuca City, AZ	Jeanette L. Reeves, Benson, AZ
Summer Walter, Benson, AZ	Terry L. Reeves, Benson, AZ
Lynn Gray, McNeal, AZ	Tricia Gerrodette, Sierra Vista, AZ
Jerome Gray, McNeal, AZ	Mieko Hara Brown, Douglas, AZ
David Ivan Clark, Douglas, AZ	Wawaise Schmidt, Douglas, AZ

Mark Schmidt, McNeal, AZ	Lawana Diffie, Douglas, AZ
Conrad M. Spencer, Benson, AZ	Crystal K. Spencer, Benson, AZ
Paul Hirt, Portal, AZ	Linda Jackson, Portal, AZ
Kim Vicariu, Portal, AZ	Jeffrey A. Wakefield, Portal, AZ
Susanne Apitz, Portal, AZ	Helen Andrus Snyder, Portal, AZ
Noel Friedrich Ralph Snyder, Portal, AZ	Leroy Dyal III, Portal, AZ
Bob Karp, Sierra Vista, AZ	Cinthia Beeman, St. David, AZ
Raechel Running, Bisbee, AZ	

April 24, 2023 (original)

April 25, 2023 (corrected)

Honorable Governor Katie Hobbs
1700 W. Washington St.
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Members of the Legislature
Arizona State Capital Complex
1700 W. Washington St
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Mr. Thomas Buschatzke, Director
Arizona Department of Water Resources
1110 W. Washington St., Suite 310
Phoenix, AZ 85007

RE: Protection of the Willcox Groundwater Basin

Dear Governor Hobbs and Director Buschatzke,

We are all residents of the Willcox Groundwater Basin in eastern Cochise County who depend on the groundwater here to sustain our lives and our homes. We are writing to ask you to take action to address the serious groundwater challenges we are facing here.

Our groundwater basin is one of the most threatened in the state with an overdraft of 5 to 8 times the natural recharge, and consequently, we are experiencing rapidly declining water tables. Many of us have had to deepen our domestic wells at significant cost within the past 10 years and we can personally attest to declines in our water table of between 5-10 feet per year over the past 20 years. Some of us have been unable to afford to drill a new deeper well and are now having water hauled to our homes at a much higher monthly expense. We know neighbors who have moved elsewhere because of the declining water table. A few of us have been fortunate enough that our wells are still holding out but we know it is just a matter of time before we too have to deepen our wells or move on.

Many of us moved here at a time when the groundwater withdrawals were more in balance with the natural recharge and the annual declines in the water table were much smaller. The situation has changed dramatically in the past 25 years primarily driven by an estimated 50% increase in agricultural irrigation. Without any groundwater protections in place (as is the case in much of rural Arizona) there is a literal "free for all" where only those with the deepest pockets and the deepest wells will survive. It is time to stop the depletion of the Willcox Basin and put measures in place to sustainably manage our precious groundwater throughout all of rural Arizona.

Given the current groundwater situation in the Willcox Basin we urge you to take the following actions:

- 1) We ask Governor Hobbs to prioritize the passage of the Local Groundwater Stewardship Area bill (HB2731/SB1306). Despite having broad bipartisan support among leaders across much of rural Arizona, this bill was not scheduled for a committee hearing earlier in the current

legislative session. The time is long overdue that the political leadership in Arizona addressed the serious groundwater issues throughout much of rural Arizona and enacted legislation tailored to the specific needs of rural communities. The LGSA bill has incorporated significant input from officials and concerned citizens from rural areas across the state, including here in the Willcox Basin. There are a number of provisions within this legislation that make it a better fit for rural Arizona than the current AMA related statutes. The LGSA legislation addresses at least three significant issues that contributed to the November 2022 defeat of the AMA referendum in the Willcox Basin. First, it provides specific measures that increase local control and input for the groundwater management process. Second, it provides more flexibility concerning transferability of irrigation allocations (an AMA currently has no flexibility in moving an irrigation allocation to another parcel within a basin which was a significant reason many Willcox area winegrowers were opposed to the AMA). Third, it provides a process for ending the LGSA if it is no longer needed.

- 2) We ask Director Buschatzke to initiate an INA/AMA designation process for the Willcox Groundwater Basin as authorized in ARS 45-412, ARS 45-432, and ARS-45-433. We ask the Director to initiate this process as soon as possible in recognition of the significant overdraft and the ongoing and growing decline in the depth to water throughout this basin. We understand that initiation of this process will put a hold on any new irrigation until the process is completed. We are supportive of the LGSA legislation but in the event that it is not passed in this legislative session the urgency of the situation here means we need to fall back on the existing provisions within Title 45 to stop the depletion of our aquifer. We were encouraged by the Director's recent INA designation for the Hualapai Basin and hope our request will get the same serious consideration.
- 3) In the event that the Local Groundwater Stewardship Area (LGSA) bill is passed and signed by the Governor prior to completion of the INA/AMA designation process, we ask Director Buschatzke to consider initiating the process to designate the Willcox Groundwater Basin an LGSA as we believe it would be the preferred solution by the majority of residents here since it clearly addresses a number of objections voters here had with an AMA(see item #1). As currently written the LGSA includes a provision authorizing the ADWR Director to take such action.

We appreciate your careful consideration of our concerns.

Respectfully submitted by the following 127 Willcox Basin Residents,

Steven C. Kisiel, Pearce, AZ	Cheryl Knott, Pearce, AZ
Lucia M. Kisiel, Pearce, AZ	Elaine Santo, Pearce, AZ
Karen Sartain, Pearce, AZ	Jessica Dilworth, Pearce, AZ
Jeff Sartain, Pearce, AZ	Robin Peterson, Pearce, AZ
Melanie Lawrence, Cochise, AZ	Jessica Jones, Pearce, AZ
Lou Manuta, Pearce, AZ	Moiria Hagerlin, Pearce, AZ
Janet Manuta, Pearce, AZ	Vince Hagerlin, Pearce, AZ
John Graffio, Pearce, AZ	Tanya Bok, Cochise, AZ

Terry Kleber, Pearce, AZ	Jim Soderquist, Cochise, AZ
Dianne Kleber, Pearce, AZ	Karen Bogner, Pearce, AZ
James Amayi-Kelley, Cochise, AZ	Jim Verner, Pearce, AZ
Anneke Meyer, Dragoon, AZ	Katherine Brown, Cochise, AZ
Damon Bostrom, Pearce, AZ	Dan Clark, Dragoon, AZ
Joanne Weiner, Cochise, AZ	Hazard Hawk, Cochise, AZ
Lisa Glenn, Willcox, AZ	Deborah Hawk, Cochise, AZ
Lloyd Glenn, Willcox, AZ	Claudia Lunden, Cochise, AZ
Timothy Austin, Cochise, AZ	Paul Lunden, Cochise, AZ
Donna F. Brown, Pearce, AZ	Glenn Klingler, Cochise, AZ
Gary F. Brown, Pearce, AZ	Martha Klingler, Cochise, AZ
Kathy Carter, Willcox, AZ	William McElroy, Cochise, AZ
Stuart Carter, Willcox, AZ	Jessica Stanley, Cochise, AZ
Therese Arsenault, Willcox, AZ	Denise Greene, Pearce, AZ
Gary Baker, Pearce, AZ	Todd Schmidt, Pearce, AZ
Rona Baker, Pearce, AZ	Vance Williams, Pearce, AZ
Marie-Paule Shiver, Pearce, AZ	Billie Jo Cross, Pearce, AZ
Ellen Cohen, Dragoon, AZ	Tom Spierings, Pearce, AZ
Kay Nelson, Willcox, AZ	Angela Spierings, Pearce, AZ
Mike Nelson, Willcox, AZ	Marc Boutte, Dragoon, AZ
Sharon Arthur, Cochise, AZ	Berta Margarita Acosta, Cochise, AZ
Tracy Caras, Dragoon, AZ	Ann Spaulding, Dragoon, AZ
Peter Caras, Dragoon, AZ	Robert Brooks, Dragoon, AZ
Tricia Buck-Messinger, Cochise, AZ	Victoria Brand, Pearce, AZ
Eric L. Messinger, Cochise, AZ	Jeffrey Brand, Pearce, AZ
Michael T. Buck, Cochise, AZ	Monica Mize, Cochise, AZ
Kayleen Buck, Cochise, AZ	Cherrie Brinlee, Cochise, AZ
John R. Miller, Dragoon, AZ	Carrie A. Jones, Cochise, AZ
Samuel J. Klein, Cochise, AZ	Jason M. Jones, Cochise, AZ
Caila A. Block, Cochise, AZ	Robert Fino, Pearce, AZ
Edie Kincaid, Cochise, AZ	Sandra Perona-Fino, Pearce, AZ
Arthur Earl Kincaid, Cochise, AZ	Carolyn Lukensmeyer, Pearce, AZ
Rodolfo Antonio Poe, Cochise, AZ	Daniel Sacco, Pearce, AZ
James Zachary Jones, Cochise, AZ	Patricia Sacco, Pearce, AZ
Lora Ann Chiehowsky, Cochise, AZ	Karen Weilacher, Cochise, AZ
Luke Zachary Jones Chiehowsky, Cochise, AZ	Gretchen Hanson, Pearce, AZ
Laurette LeVine, Willcox, AZ	William Dillavou, Cochise, AZ
Mark LeVine, Willcox, AZ,	Kay Dillavou, Cochise, AZ
Jeanie Mudd, Pearce, AZ	Jody Telfair-Richards, Pearce, AZ
Jeff Bernard, Pearce, AZ	Sally Newland, Pearce, AZ
Judy Bernard, Pearce, AZ	Gail Gelardi, Cochise, AZ
David Buchanan, Cochise, AZ	Sharon Gibson, Pearce, AZ
Ioana Datcu, Pearce, AZ	Robin Cruickshank, Pearce, AZ
Susan Houser, Pearce, AZ	Joanne Richardson, Cochise, AZ
Frederick W. Skillman, Cochise, AZ	Kathleen Johnston, Willcox, AZ
Carol M. Skillman, Cochise, AZ	Willis Johnston, Willcox, AZ
Talena DeBaun, Pearce, AZ	Stephanie Johnston, Cochise, AZ
Leon Hansen, Willcox, AZ	David Johnston, Cochise, AZ

Karla Hansen, Willcox, AZ	Pat Vicario, Pearce, AZ
Janet Randall, Willcox, AZ	Jeanie Vicario, Pearce, AZ
Joan Nomides, Pearce, AZ	Larry Jordan, Pearce, AZ
Alexis Nomides, Pearce, AZ	Kent Andrew Shaver, Willcox, AZ
Gary L. Taylor, Willcox, AZ	Norah Shaver, Willcox, AZ
Maria P. Taylor, Willcox, AZ	Shannon Brown, Willcox, AZ
Beatrice Josefina Reja	Vickie Brown, Willcox, AZ

WILLCOX OPINION

Local opinion: Water crisis calls for new legislation

**Lisa Glenn –
Special to the Arizona Daily Star**

January 24, 2024

The following is the opinion and analysis of the writer:

Governor Hobbs said in her State of the State speech, much needs to be done to secure water in Arizona, most pressingly in the unregulated rural areas. Her bipartisan water council recently made recommendations to protect and preserve groundwater in rural Arizona. It is imperative that our legislators put these recommendations into action.



Lisa Glenn

For too long overdraft of the groundwater basins has been ignored. This is especially true in the Willcox Basin, where we have been in serious overdraft since well before 1990. Since around 2015, large-scale industrialized agriculture has sunk 100s of wells, many as deep as 1,500–2,000 feet, some of them pumping more than 1,800 gallons per minute. Between 2015 and the end of 2020, 407+ new wells were drilled in the Willcox Basin, many of them belonging to just one entity. When that many wells pump from that depth, water is pulled down by gravity to the lowest level, and wells go dry. Very few people have the money to drill deep enough to compete. The last few years have seen many of our small farmers and other rural residents sell out, and some leave the area altogether.

My husband and I have lived in the Willcox Basin since 1967, and my husband has lived in Willcox most of his life. We have watched over the years as the water situation has impacted many of our friends and acquaintances, their businesses, and the community itself. People we know, our friends and others tell of their wells going dry, and having to drill deeper at great expense, or haul in water they have to pay for. Some have had to cut back on the amount of crops grown, or land irrigated. For some, their land has been sinking. But another, more insidious harm to the community is the division among the people caused by misinformation or no information from those who are supposed to be in charge of our water. Three different groups of Willcox Basin residents have tried over the years to appeal to the Legislature for needed action. Their ideas never even got out of committee for a hearing!

Before 1940, it was estimated that up to 97 millions+ acre-feet of water (326,000 gallons per acre-foot), or 31 trillion, 622 billion gallons of water was stored in the Willcox aquifer (ADWR report).

In 2020 alone, Willcox Basin groundwater users pumped about 240,000* acre-feet from the aquifer (7 billion, 824 million gallons), a 92% increase over the annual average irrigation estimates through the 1990s, and about 5+ times more that the aquifer gets in recharge.

Let's see where we are today! The latest report put out by ADWR in late 2023 has some eye-popping estimated statistics. I say "estimated statistics" because there is no mandated metering or monitoring of rural groundwater pumping. The report states that under any projected scenario, there is insufficient annual supply to the groundwater to meet annual demand. Our long-term overdraft has resulted in a total storage decrease of about 3,590,300 acre-feet of water (117 (billion),043,780,000 gallons of water)!

As of 2018, all the available water estimated to be in storage to 409 feet (the average well depth in the Willcox Basin) has been withdrawn. Now our water storage volume is in a NEGATIVE range, as the water table has been drawn down to below the average well depth.

The prosperity of any rural community is inherently linked to the viability of all those who live in the groundwater basins and must encompass sustainability.

I urge our legislators to stop obstructing and minimizing progress. Pass legislation to regulate and protect rural groundwater by implementing a plan that serves all basin residents in a fair manner. If they do not, I urge Governor Hobbs to take action!

Lisa Glenn is a retired educator who has lived in Willcox with her husband Lloyd, a retired small business owner, for 57 years.

https://tucson.com/opinion/column/local-opinion-water-crisis-calls-for-new-legislation/article_4fb1681a-b559-11ee-a4ec-07bd241aaf55.html

**This number was corrected to 240,000 acre feet in the printed version of this opinion piece, and is corrected here to reflect that.*

AZ Central Oped, August 17, 2023

<https://www.azcentral.com/story/opinion/op-ed/2023/08/17/groundwater-rural-arizona-trouble-gov-hobbs-designate-ina-ama/70607418007/>

If the Arizona Legislature won't protect rural groundwater, Gov. Hobbs must step in

Opinion: Legislation can better address rural Arizona's groundwater problems. But if lawmakers refuse to help us, Gov. Katie Hobbs must step in.



Steve Kisiel, Paul Hirt, Tricia Gerrodette and Peter Else
opinion contributors

We are residents in four rural groundwater basins in southern Arizona, where threats to our water security are becoming more acute every year. Yet our pleas to protect our groundwater go repeatedly ignored by the Legislature.

Because of this, we are asking Gov. Katie Hobbs to use her executive authority to initiate steps to designate our basins as new Irrigation Non-Expansion Areas (INAs) or Active Management Areas (AMAs), which would trigger rules to begin managing our water supplies.

Most of rural Arizona was excluded from groundwater protections established by the 1980 Groundwater Management Act. And in the 40-plus years since, demands on our finite rural groundwater supplies have increased dramatically.

Our groundwater is rapidly depleting



Two of us live in the Willcox and San Simon basins, where we have seen significant [increases in industrial agricultural irrigation](#) driven by non-local investor-owned companies. They are attracted to Arizona's good growing conditions and lack of groundwater regulation.

The other two of us live in the Upper and Lower San Pedro, which have witnessed increased demand for our finite groundwater driven by other factors: Population growth, new development and mining.

The consequences of this alarming depletion of our groundwater supplies include declining water levels (as much as 10 feet per year in some areas) — resulting in [dried-up wells, land subsidence, earth fissures](#), property damage, and reduced water flow in ecologically important rivers and streams.

Without rules or management of groundwater, depletion of groundwater supplies can accelerate quickly — a race to the bottom, which rural communities are sure to lose. For example, a single dairy corporation from the Midwest arrived in the Willcox Basin in 2014 and by 2020 was irrigating 40,000 acres and pumping 110,000 acre-feet of water per year.

Lawmakers refuse to regulate our basins

Bipartisan rural groundwater management legislation to address some of these concerns was introduced in each of the last four Arizona legislative sessions. Iterations of the Rural Management Area legislation were introduced in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

Local Groundwater Stewardship Area (LGSA) legislation was introduced in 2023, proposing a flexible groundwater management process adaptable to the unique circumstances in each of the

state's rural groundwater basins. Additionally, the 2023 LGSA bill allowed for more local participation in groundwater management than under the 1980 Groundwater Management Act.

A few powerful opponents blocked all of the bills while offering no good faith alternatives. While we wait for solutions our groundwater supplies continue to decline, and the water sustainability crisis in rural Arizona worsens.

Gov. Hobbs said she'd help rural areas

Gov. Hobbs recognizes our plight in rural Arizona and said she would do something about it. In her State of the State address in January she said: "It's time to update groundwater management tools and protect groundwater supplies — particularly in our rural communities. We must take these actions today because in many parts of our state, there are effectively no restrictions on groundwater pumping and local communities have little-to-no support to manage water supplies."

We agree.

At the inaugural meeting of the new [Governor's Water Policy Council](#), Hobbs asked the council to develop recommendations for a management framework to protect rural groundwater. At that same meeting, the governor said she is willing to take executive action to support local communities.

If lawmakers block, Hobbs must step in

The Arizona Department of Water Resources director has the authority to initiate an AMA or INA designation for individual basins (ARS 45-432). The authority was recently used to [designate the Hualapai Basin](#) near Kingman as an INA — the first such designation by the department since 1981.

We believe new legislation could better design solutions for our rural communities than AMAs or INAs. However, in those basins with the most critical overdraft, executive action should be seriously considered given the failure to even get a hearing on new legislation over the past four years.

We are out of time and can no longer stand by while [our water supplies](#) and, in time, our communities, disappear.

Gov. Hobbs, if a few in the Legislature continue to block commonsense solutions for us in rural Arizona, we will stand firmly behind you taking executive action to designate our basins as new AMAs or INAs.

Steve Kisiel, a resident of Pearce, lives in the Willcox Basin. Paul Hirt, of Portal, lives in the San Simon Basin. Tricia Gerrodette, of Sierra Vista, resides in the Upper San Pedro Basin. Peter Else, of Mammoth, lives in the Lower San Pedro Basin. Reach them at cochisegroundwaterstewards@gmail.com, phirt@vtc.net, tricia.gerrodette@gmail.com and LowerSanPedro@gmail.com.

Willcox Basin – Supply & Demand Study Highlights

Background

Under ARS 45-105(B)(14), ADWR is required to assess the supply and demand of state groundwater basins. This one-page summary highlights findings from ADWR's 2023 assessment of the Willcox Basin (available at <https://www.azwater.gov/supply-demand>).

Baseline Estimates: Supply and Storage

Agricultural groundwater demand in the Willcox basin has remained relatively constant since 1990. The average annual groundwater withdrawal from 1990-2022 was 157,819 acre-feet (AF).

Estimated annual supply volumes are far less than the demands, resulting in a **3,590,300 AF decrease in water available in storage over 33 years in the Willcox basin.**

As of 2018, all the available water estimated to be in storage to 409 feet (average well depth in the Willcox basin) had been withdrawn. The storage volume is now negative because, **on average, the water table has been drawn down to below the average well depth.**

Projection Scenarios (2023-2075)

The Willcox area has significant potential for agricultural growth, which would further stress groundwater supplies (665,000 acres of available private and state land). If all private and state land was irrigated, it would increase demand by an estimated 230,000 AF.

Status Quo, Climate, Conservation, and Technology Project Scenarios

In these four scenarios, for **every 1 AF of supply entering the basin, about 3 AF are leaving the basin.**

These four scenarios show a relatively consistent **average imbalance of about -147,000 AF annually** from 2023-2075.

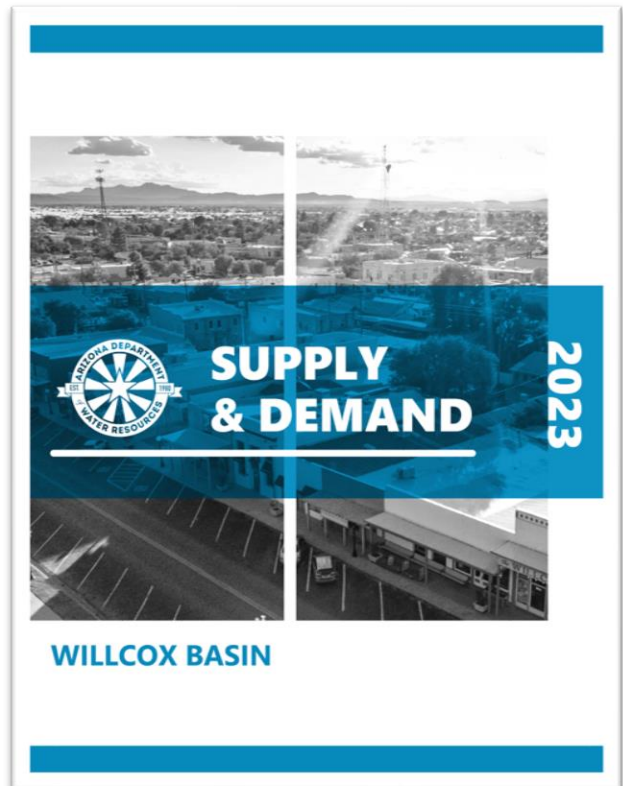
There is an **overall decrease in storage of 7.6-7.8 million AF from 2023-2075** for each of these four scenarios.

Growth Scenario

In the growth scenario, about **3.7 AF leave the basin for every 1 AF supply, with a total storage decrease of 13.7 million AF** from 2023-2075.

Insufficient Groundwater Supplies

There is insufficient annual supply to meet yearly demand under any projected scenario.



Willcox Groundwater Basin, Supply and Demand 1990 -2022



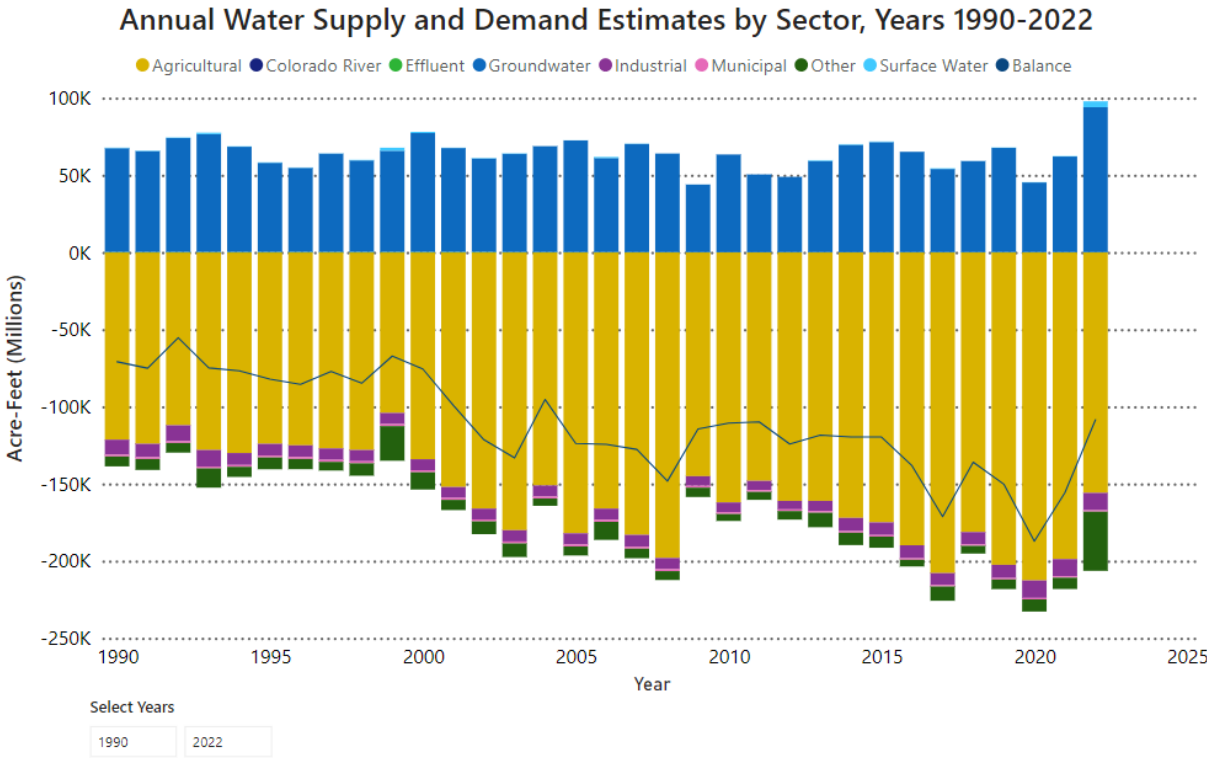
2023 Supply and Demand Report Results

Butler Valley, Douglas AMA, Harquahala INA, McMullen Valley, San Bernardino Valley, Tiger Wash, and Willcox



Filter by Groundwater Basin

Willcox



Source: <https://www.azwater.gov/supply-demand>

Willcox Groundwater Basin Qualifies for Designation as Irrigation Non-Expansion Area

Op-Ed by Rep. Gail Griffin
Jul 11, 2024

Over the past 12 months, Republican lawmakers held over 100 meetings to develop legislation addressing rural groundwater in areas like the Willcox Groundwater Basin. This includes Senate Bill 1221, which would have empowered the director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) to close three “priority basins” – including Willcox – to new pumping and reduce existing pumping by 10 percent over 10 years, with the opportunity for 15 percent over 20 years.

A Joint Legislative Ad Hoc Committee found that Senate Bill 1221 would have significantly mitigated groundwater depletion in these critical areas, but the bill did not pass due to lack of Democrat support. Although this local basin management plan did not pass, Republicans continue to seek solutions that address rural groundwater issues without harming local economies, which are largely agriculture-based. Meanwhile, existing tools are available to manage groundwater declines.



Currently, the director of ADWR holds the authority to declare an “Irrigation Non-Expansion Area” (INA) in any basin if two conditions are met: (1) groundwater supplies for current agricultural needs are insufficient; and (2) the establishment of an “Active Management Area” (AMA) is not necessary.

Many, including farmers, believe Willcox basin’s groundwater levels are insufficient to maintain current withdrawals, especially with ongoing agricultural expansion. ADWR’s 2022 Supply and Demand Assessment indicated that groundwater use from agriculture in 2022 exceeded supplies by nearly 58,000 acre-feet, showing that hydrological conditions for an INA have been met.

In 2022, residents voted 2-to-1 against the establishment of an AMA, suggesting they don’t believe the establishment of an AMA necessary. However, ADWR could determine otherwise. The director serves at the governor’s discretion, intertwining the issue with political considerations.

If the director determines an AMA is necessary, it precludes an INA from moving forward. But if the director does not also establish an AMA, it delays needed action while worsening groundwater conditions. Inaction might be preferred by some radical environmental groups who see crisis as a means to expand government power, but local communities demand immediate intervention.

If the governor wishes to mitigate groundwater depletion in Willcox, she can instruct the ADWR director to declare an INA swiftly. According to Arizona Revised Statutes 45-437, this would

prevent new agricultural lands from being introduced in the basin, halt expansion of existing operations, curb new groundwater pumping, and require farmers to report annual water use. This would help manage existing groundwater levels without exacerbation and enhance the understanding of hydrological conditions. INA status can be elevated to an AMA if needed, as seen with the Douglas Groundwater Basin.

An INA would exempt residential wells pumping less than 35 gallons per minute, sparing small property owners. Additional tools could include a water delivery system or district to assist residential well owners. However, small farmers, who use less water and have plans to expand, would be impacted. Despite these consequences, many constituents, including farmers, advocate for an INA.

Ultimately, designating the Willcox Groundwater Basin as an INA would provide immediate relief and prevent further groundwater pumping, improving the situation. It would also provide time to develop

new groundwater management tools that work for rural Arizona, without exacerbating existing conditions. Until new legislation is adopted to address rural groundwater without harming local economies, the governor must utilize existing tools to prevent further deterioration.

Gail Griffin is the State Representative for Legislative District 14, which includes Sierra Vista.

https://www.myheraldreview.com/news/cochise_county/willcox-groundwater-basin-qualifies-for-designation-as-irrigation-non-expansion-area/article_17a1e4a6-3fcc-11ef-9c39-0bb3ac9d1146.html

Timeline of rural communities seeking groundwater solutions, 2015 – present

2015

- The Legislature rejects the Groundwater Conservation Area proposal from the Willcox area, which would have created an alternative to AMAs and INAs.
- ADWR receives and rejects a petition for a new INA in the San Simon Basin.

2016

- ADWR receives and rejects a petition for a new INA in Mohave County's Hualapai Valley Basin.

2017

- The Governor's office proposes a handful of reforms related to rural groundwater, though no subsequent bills were introduced in the 2018 legislature.
- The Legislature rejects a bill to authorize groundwater surveys (HB 2520).

2018

- The Legislature funds a Hualapai Basin groundwater study (only water bill to pass that year).

2019

- The Legislature passes a bill to authorize groundwater study committees in Mohave and La Paz Counties.

2020

- Over 60 water bills are introduced, including over a dozen rural water bills and bills to create "Rural Management Areas" or RMAs. RMAs would have created a locally-driven alternative to AMAs and INAs. RMA bills receive informational hearings but are not given a chance for votes.
- ADWR receives and rejects a 2nd petition for a new INA in Mohave County's Hualapai Valley.

2021

- An RMA bill is introduced again but given no hearing. Mohave groundwater study committee meets regularly from August to November and passes recommendations to reform rural groundwater law.
- Arizona Water Defenders begin the petition process to create new AMAs in the Douglas and Willcox Basins.

2022

- Members of the Governors Water Council Non-AMA Subcommittee form a new group after efforts to discuss rural groundwater protections are blocked.
- Coconino, La Paz, Mohave, and Yavapai Counties unanimously pass resolutions urging the Governor and Legislature to pass a law to protect rural groundwater.
- The Douglas AMA passes, the Willcox AMA fails. ADWR designates the Hualapai Valley INA.

2023

- A Local Groundwater Stewardship Area bill is introduced in the Legislature (HB 2731; SB 1306) by the House and Senate Majority Leaders. These bills are blocked again.
- Over 100 Willcox residents send a letter to the ADWR Director and Governor requesting executive action if the Legislature again fails to pass an alternative to AMAs and INAs.
- The bipartisan Rural Groundwater Committee of the Governor's Water Policy Council publicly deliberates rural groundwater management and proposes a set of recommendations.

2024

- The Water Policy Council's recommendations are introduced as HB2857. This bill is blocked again. SB1221 is crafted behind closed doors and introduced to undercut HB2857.
- Over 200 Willcox residents and neighbors send a letter to the Legislature and Governor opposing SB1221 and calling for meaningful solutions.
- The Legislature adjourns, again failing to advance a rural groundwater management alternative to AMAs or INAs.

Land Subsidence Imagery

AZ Dept of Water Resources

Land Subsidence in the Willcox Basin

Groundwater Decline

Within the Willcox Basin, water levels have steadily declined since the 1950's. Throughout the region groundwater levels have decreased between 100 and 300 feet. The Kansas Settlement area shows the greatest decline in groundwater levels between 1975 and 1990. There is a correlation between groundwater pumping and groundwater declines throughout the basin.

The following hydrographs within the area illustrate these declines throughout the area:



Water Use per [ADWR Willcox Groundwater Flow Model, 2018](#)



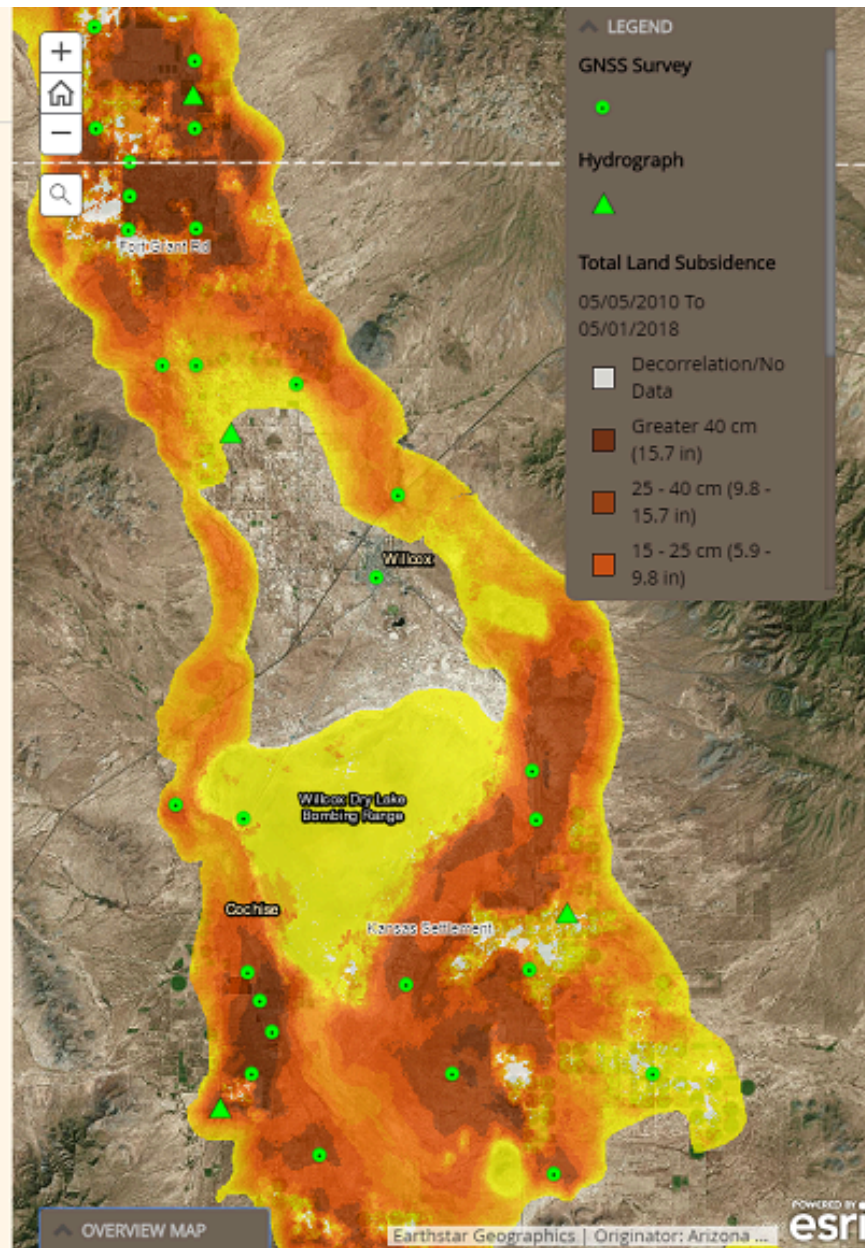
D-15-25 25AAD Kansas Settlement, lower confined aquifer [Hydrograph](#) | [Map](#)



Sunsites, Southwest of Playa [Hydrograph](#) | [Map](#)



D-13-24 16BBB North of the Playa [Hydrograph](#) | [Map](#)





This photo shows the approximate location of maximum measured subsidence in the Willcox Basin identified by Brian D. Conway of ADWR (pictured). The site is in the northern part of the basin, 12 miles north of the Town of Willcox. Signs on the pole show approximate altitude of land surface in 1969 and in 2018.

Source: ADWR (<https://azwater.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=c5758018997c402b863c11e36727ed31>)