

CWAG 2023 Candidate Forum Questions

Prescott Council & Mayor Primary Election

The purpose of the Candidate Forum is to insert water issues into the political and electoral dialogue, to educate voters and candidates about water issues, and to inform the public about the candidates' knowledge and positions on water issues. In general, we pose open-ended questions, avoid yes/no answers, and encourage debate and discussion among the candidates. The questions address important local water issues and attempt to create awareness, in both the candidates and audience, of the potential solutions. We pose questions that generate explanations and discussion about policy – this isn't a technical quiz.

I. Prescott Water Issues and Priorities

A. Question: What do you see as the major water management issues facing Prescott?

II. Prescott Water Conservation Planning

A. Introduction: Prescott's current water conservation efforts include tiered water rates and an incentive program for existing homes. For new construction, there are requirements for water-efficient fixtures and drought-tolerant landscaping. Collectively, these measures constitute the best water conservation measures in the Prescott Active Management Area (PrAMA). However, these ad hoc measures are not part of a regularly updated conservation master plan with goals, analyses, and milestones looking at least 20 years into the future. For example, Albuquerque, Tucson (see CWAG video archive) and many other cities have had great success with conservation planning.

B. Questions:

1. What priority should Prescott give to funding a conservation master plan with targets, milestones, and conservation measures for reducing the city's water use and contribution to the overdraft? Explain your answer.
2. What ideas do you have for promoting conservation, especially for landscapes, commercial, business, multifamily, and construction water users?

III. Regional Water Planning and The Upper Verde River Watershed Protection Coalition

A. Introduction: Water users in the Upper Verde River Watershed share a common water resource that is being steadily depleted by excessive pumping. The Upper Verde River Watershed Protection Coalition, established 17 years ago, was created as a regional water planning effort but has yet to produce effective programs to improve water conservation in the AMA or protect the upper Verde River. Recently, Prescott and Chino Valley have attempted to redirect the Coalition to have a greater role in regional water planning, but the Coalition's questionable accounting practices, resistance to change, and lack of effectiveness caused Prescott to withdraw funding and membership. Unfortunately, this first attempt at regional cooperation was unsuccessful, and now there are no effective regional water resource planning efforts.

B. Questions:

1. Should Prescott move to organize a new regional water planning group? Explain your answer.
2. If you support regional planning efforts, what should be the goal of these efforts?
3. Should regional planning include preservation of the base flow of the upper Verde in its mandate?
4. What parties should participate? Should Prescott share in funding this effort?

IV. Water Quality: Arsenic and PFAS

A. Introduction: Arsenic, which occurs naturally in our groundwater, is a known carcinogen associated with a number of other adverse health effects. It is considered to pose a risk of cancer at any level greater than zero – the lower the level of arsenic, the lower the risk of cancer. Additionally, in 2022 we learned that groundwater from Prescott’s production wells in Chino Valley and at the airport contained two PFAS – the “forever chemicals.” At this time, a high producing well at the airport has been removed from service. To provide drinking water, Prescott blends groundwater from high arsenic/low PFAS wells with water from low arsenic/higher PFAS wells to deliver water that barely meets the EPA’s arsenic standard and proposed PFAS standards.

B. Questions:

1. Are you comfortable that the current blending strategy adequately protects public health? Please explain your answer.
2. Should Prescott spend or request additional funds for further improvements in water quality? Please explain your answer.

V. Respect for Citizen Initiatives: Prop 401

A. Introduction: In 2009, Prescott voters passed Proposition 401 by a substantial margin. The proposition is now Article 6, Section 16 of the City Charter. It requires voter approval for construction of expensive infrastructure, including the Big Chino pipeline. Although the City of Prescott recognizes that the Big Chino is not needed for its projected buildout, Prescott Valley continues to advocate for the pipeline because it lacks water needed to achieve its growth goals.

B. Question:

1. If elected, would you stand by the right of Prescott residents to vote whether or not to approve financing needed to build the pipeline? Why or why not?
2. If Prescott voters do not authorize the financing for the BC pipeline but PV insists on pursuing it, what responsibility, if any, does Prescott have to help solve PV’s water supply problem?

VI. Verde River/Big Chino Pipeline

A. Introduction: In a 2010 litigation settlement agreement with Salt River Project, Prescott and Prescott Valley promised to support Wild and Scenic River designation for the upper Verde River and to mitigate any impact to the minimum flow of the Verde River caused by their pumping in the Big Chino Sub-Basin. SRP/PV/COP agreed to develop a groundwater model, but the development process has occurred behind closed doors and has missed several deadlines. No information on mitigation has been released.

B. Questions:

1. Yes or no, rapid response:

- a)** Do you agree with the Prescott Council's support of the Upper Verde Wild and Scenic River?
- b)** If the Big Chino pipeline is built to transfer Big Chino groundwater to Prescott and Prescott Valley, will you publicly reaffirm the 2010 Agreement in Principle and commit to do no harm to the base flow of the Verde River?
- c)** Do you support keeping discussion of the modeling secret?
- d)** Should Prescott wait for the Big Chino model or immediately begin to develop a long-term water management plan?

VII. Responsible decisions: Legality vs Wisdom, Paper water vs Sustainable water.

A. Introduction: State water laws were written to support economic growth - not to sustainably manage groundwater or protect rivers and springs. After 20 years of ADWR management plans with the goal to reach safe yield, our annual overdraft has more than quadrupled, water levels have dropped, and many family wells on the edges of the aquifer are drying up. Despite our growing groundwater deficit, Prescott plans to use thousands of acre-feet of “paper” groundwater to support thousands of additional houses. “Paper water” is legally authorized under current law but is not sustainable. Previously, city officials claimed that they were only doing what the law allows, but is this ethical and wise? Justification for taking any actions to increase water use must begin with COP elected officials accepting responsibility for the city’s contribution to the overdraft.

B. Questions:

1. Many citizens are worried about the effect of thousands of new homes on our water supply. Do you believe that we have a significant long-term water supply issue? Explain your answer.
2. Despite a growing and unsustainable overdraft, should Prescott continue to use “paper water” allocations allowed under state law? Explain your answer.
3. What actions might you promote and support to assure that citizens of the Prescott Active Management Area will have a sustainable water supply for themselves, their children, and future generations?