

# CWAG 2024 Candidate Forum Questions

## Board of Supervisors 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.

However, water policy must have a rational basis. CWAG provides a statement of “Basic Facts” that is a foundation for informed discussion.

Many of the following questions relate to the water-related goals stated in the Yavapai County Comprehensive Plan Update 2032. Most of these goals are worthy - they are not requirements, but merely statements of intention that do not create policies or regulations.

### I. Regional Water Planning

**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 was created in May 2007 as a regional water planning effort, but after 17 years with no significant accomplishments, it dissolved in 2023. The Board of Supervisors created the Water Advisory Committee (WAC) in January, 2005. Although the WAC successfully supported many important scientific studies on the Verde Watershed, the Supervisors terminated it in 2014. Ultimately, both of these attempts at regional cooperation were unsuccessful. There has been no effective regional water resource planning for the last decade - since 2014. The new Comprehensive Plan suggests that the County collaborate on a regional water management plan covering inside and outside the Prescott AMA.

### B. Questions:

1. Do you support Yavapai County working to improve water management in rural Arizona? How will you achieve this?
2. What should be the goals of regional planning efforts? Should they include both groundwater and hydrologically connected surface water? Should NGO's like CWAG be included?
3. Should the County prepare one water management plan for the entire County? Or should there be separate plans for west Yavapai County and the Verde Valley? Please explain.

## II. Yavapai County Water Resource Management

- A. **Introduction:** Arizona State statutes grant numerous authorities enabling counties to manage water, including for example: zoning, building codes, health & safety, flood control district for aquifer recharge, water reuse and recycling, regional wastewater recharge projects, and infrastructure improvement districts. These authorities clearly allow the County broad ability to improve water management, but previously we have been told that the County has no authority to manage water. The new Comprehensive Plan recommends a County Water Advisory Committee (WAC), a new full-time employee planner focused on water management, a public process, a water conservation program, and coordination with Flood Control.
- B. **Questions:**
1. Do you support these plan recommendations? Would you support a new WAC? Would you support a new employee? Please explain.
  2. What group should facilitate regional water planning? A new district with fiscal authority? A new Yavapai County WAC? County Flood Control? Northern Arizona Municipal Water Users Association? Others? Please support your answer.
  3. How should the County support rural residents with failing wells?

## III. Water Conservation

- A. **Introduction:** Unlike the City of Prescott, Yavapai County does not provide educational or incentive programs to reduce water use for homes with domestic wells and septic tanks. The only water conservation requirements are within the Uniform Building Code, which is basic and does not include a major consumptive use - groundwater applied to landscapes.
- B. **Questions:**
1. The water goals in the comprehensive plan rely on suggestive terms such as “request” or “encourage” that lack action or enforcement. Should the County *require* (instead of request or encourage) rigorous water conservation for new construction and offer incentives for existing buildings that use small wells and septic tanks, perhaps by supplementing the UBC with stricter County policy? What water conservation measures would you advocate?
  2. Will you support new regulations for new development to use drought tolerant landscaping, and irrigate with gray water, and/or stormwater?? Please explain.
  3. Comprehensive Plan Policy 6a states “Require new developments with golf courses or community parks to use only reclaimed wastewater for irrigation.” Will you approve any new golf courses? Please explain.

#### IV. Verde River

**A. Introduction:** The base flow of the Verde River is sharply declining every year, the result of a combination of groundwater pumping and increased temperature associated with climate change. Declining flows have changed the aquatic habitat such that USFS scientists now suggest that the upper river is no longer prime native fish habitat. This is a significant loss to one of the best remaining native fish streams in Arizona.

**B. Question:**

1. What can the County do to sustain and restore water flow in the Verde River?
2. Describe the importance and value of the Verde to you and your constituents. If elected, what actions would you take to further demonstrate the importance and value of the Verde River?

#### V. Managing Demand in the Big Chino

**A. Introduction:** Because Arizona water law has failed to protect water resources in rural Arizona, a local solution may be the only practical choice to protect the river and domestic wells in Paulden. Because Paulden and the Big Chino Valley are unincorporated, Yavapai County has an important responsibility and opportunity. Some possible county actions to protect both the upper Verde River and domestic wells in Paulden would be to:

1. Develop stormwater recharge facilities in the Paulden area.
2. Implement aggressive water conservation programs using educational messaging plus incentives to existing homeowners and requirements for new construction.
3. Prohibit using groundwater to irrigate new non-functional and ornamental landscapes.

**B. Questions:**

1. The county has existing authority to define zoning districts with enhanced conservation requirements. Should the County create a conservation zoning overlay with aggressive conservation *requirements* for areas where water management is especially critical, such as the Big Chino Valley? Would you support establishing a conservation zoning district for the Big Chino? Please explain why or why not.

2. What other ideas do you have for reducing current and future water demand in the Big Chino?

#### VI. Water Issues and Priorities

Please summarize the major water management issues facing the Verde Valley and western Yavapai County, and describe the solutions you support.