

Column: Prescott pumping water, residents need to save it

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- Originally Published: April 5, 2017 6 a.m.

The Prescott area is pumping water from the Little Chino aquifer about four times as fast as it is being replenished. The impact of this overdraft includes declining water levels in the aquifer and wells drying up in the western part of Chino Valley.

Some people claim that a pipeline to bring groundwater from the Big Chino aquifer up north at the headwaters of the upper Verde River will solve our water problems. However, the cost will be enormous and pumping will reduce the flow of the Verde unless we spend millions more to mitigate the impact. The U.S. Geological Survey computer model shows that this groundwater pumping will result in dry sections of the river and impair water rights held by downstream users.

Conservation can play a major role in achieving a sustainable water supply, especially by using less water outdoors. Homeowners can use captured rainwater and attractive drought-tolerant plants to save both water and money.

On average, each Prescott single-family home uses approximately 150 gallons of water per day. With a little care, water use can be reduced by at least one-third — that is the amount of water used for landscaping, where it evaporates and cannot be reused. We can save most of this drinking-quality water by replacing thirsty vegetation with drought-tolerant plants and by irrigating with rainwater collected and stored (harvested) in rain barrels or larger tanks.

Drought-tolerant plants can survive with little or no watering. Many of these plants are quite attractive, and these are the plants that belong here. You can see examples at the Granite Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation building, 882 Sunset Avenue (where the Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) meets), two blocks behind the True Value Hardware store, or see the Low Water Use Drought Tolerant Plant List at prescott-az.gov/_d/plant_list.pdf.

Rainwater doesn't contain chlorine, lime or calcium, which makes it ideal for watering flowers and vegetable gardens. Using stored rain will lower your water bill. You can supplement harvested rain by saving water used to wash fruits and vegetables: catch it in a bowl and then pour it on your plants.

Rain barrels come in various sizes, from about 50 to over 1,000 gallons. Smaller barrels can be “daisy chained” to provide more storage. Barrels can be purchased from stores or online, or low-cost barrels can be made from used 50-gallon plastic food-grade drums. For larger containers, consider Intermediate Bulk Containers in 175-or 275-gallon size. You can see a large rainwater harvesting system at the Adult Center of Prescott, 1280 E Rosser St. The CWAG website, cwagaz.org, has links to much helpful information.

With a little care, we can save significant water in our homes, protect the aquifer and save money on our water bills.

April is Water Awareness Month. On April 8, Daniel Higgins will present “From Valley of the Sun to Sun Corridor: Broadening the Discussion on Arizona’s Water Future.” See cwagaz.org for details.

Fred Oswald is a CWAG board member and a retired NASA engineer.