

## Talk of the Town: 2022 could determine our water future

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Three water issues that could determine our water future are coming to a head for Prescott and Prescott Valley in 2022. The Prescott City Council will vote to revise a controversial 2019 policy that included providing water outside city limits without annexation. The Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) will rule on Prescott's Designation of Assured Water Supply for the next 10 - 20 years. And, Prescott and Prescott Valley will receive a long-awaited groundwater flow model of the Big Chino aquifer that will yield much needed information about the ramifications of a Big Chino pipeline. Here's what citizens need to know.

Newly elected Prescott Mayor Phil Goode has announced that revising the city's water policy is a top priority. In January, he will appoint an ad hoc committee of citizens to help. The Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) will be advocating for a return to a water budget (instead of examining water usage 5 years after it's allocated), limiting administrative approval and providing for more council oversight and public transparency, and eliminating the 2019 policy that provided water outside city limits without annexation.

The State of Arizona has granted a "Designation of Assured Water Supply" to the City of Prescott, affirming that at least 100 years of water is physically, legally and continuously available to serve the city's existing customers and additional growth. This designation, also known as a Decision and Order (D&O), must be renewed every 10 years and expires at the end of 2021. When approved, the D&O will dictate how much water the city can allocate to new development. At the Dec. 7 Prescott Council Water Issues Subcommittee meeting, it was promised that the city's application for renewal, due on Dec. 31, would be posted on the city's website for public review. CWAG will closely monitor Prescott's application and ADWR's decision, in order to assure that we will indeed have an adequate water supply.

It has been said at several Prescott Council meetings that the city doesn't need water from the proposed Big Chino pipeline for buildout. Meanwhile, Prescott's pipeline partner, Prescott Valley, in its draft General Plan 2035,

says additional supplies from outside the Prescott Active Management Area groundwater basin are necessary to complete its growth and water supply goal. It seems inevitable that some kind of drama will ensue during the summer of 2022 after the expected release of a new groundwater model analyzing the effects of a water transfer from the Big Chino Aquifer on the flow in the Verde River. Will Salt River Project, Prescott and Prescott Valley all accept the model or will some partners tear it apart? Will mitigation of the pipeline pumping be possible and if so, how much will it cost? Will the pipeline project go to Prescott voters, as required by 2009's Prop 401?

Mayor Goode has already taken steps toward more transparency in our city government, but transparency is a two-way street. We, the citizens, must do our part. Be informed and get involved. CWAG needs your help. In 2022, our future water supply is at stake.

*Leslie Hoy is a Prescott resident, a CWAG member since 2002, and a CWAG board member for many of those years.*