

# The Daily Courier

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## **Guest Column: Start now to achieve safe yield by 2025**

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What must we do to reach safe yield and why? Achieving safe yield by 2025 is an important part of the mission of the Upper Verde River Watershed Protection Coalition, which includes all local jurisdictions in the Prescott Active Management Area (PAMA).

To develop a plan to reach safe yield, in 2008 the coalition established a Safe Yield Workgroup consisting of technical representatives from the local jurisdictions and representatives from local interest groups, including the Citizens Water Advocacy Group. The workgroup met monthly and then issued its recommendations by consensus.

Because actions to achieve safe yield will require major projects and thus major expenditures, the workgroup concluded it was premature to evaluate specific projects in the absence of a management structure and source of financing. In its final report, the workgroup evaluated four management structures for achieving safe yield.

The report concluded that the creation of a regional replenishment district was the best management option. It recommended that the coalition's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) be assigned the task of outlining explicit details of how to create one.

What exactly is a replenishment district? It's simply a governmental entity that will develop, pay for and implement projects to achieve safe yield. Such projects could include water conservation programs, increasing groundwater recharge and importing additional water supplies. The district would be authorized to raise money to operate its projects, possibly through a secondary property tax or a fee on AMA groundwater withdrawals. Districts are normally established after a vote of the affected population and are run by an elected board.

Importantly, establishment of a district requires enabling legislation from the state. Because coalition actions require unanimous approval of its member jurisdictions, a request for enabling legislation from the coalition will demonstrate to the state that the region is united in its support for such a structure.

Some are concerned that a replenishment district would create an extra layer of government. While normally we prefer that new governmental functions be handled by existing jurisdictions, in this situation we need a common governmental entity to protect our common water supply.

The cost of continuing to overdraft our aquifer at historical rates will become enormous over coming decades.

To illustrate, the workgroup reported: "Exempt wells supply about 14 percent of the homes in the AMA, numbering approximately 10,000 wells. If these wells could no longer pump from the aquifer because of further lowering of the groundwater table, the value of the 10,000 homes would diminish drastically. It is reasonable to assume that the average drop in value would be in the \$50,000 range, meaning the total loss of value would be \$500 million. ... These estimates do not include the costs that would be necessary to replace the groundwater that the exempt wells depend on, or costs to deliver the water to those homes, assuming delivery is feasible.

"Also, the remaining 86 percent of homes would need to find replacement sources of water for the thousands of acre-feet now being pumped from the aquifer."

Thus, the costs of not reaching safe yield could easily surpass the costs to reach safe yield.

The detailed structure and powers of the proposed replenishment district haven't been worked out as yet - that's a task for the coalition TAC. But the need for an organizational structure with the authority to coordinate competing demands for our limited water supply is clear. We will have many opportunities along the way to make sure we are on the right path. But if we don't start the trip, we will never reach our goal.

The workgroup report also includes a recommendation for a public education campaign. The workgroup recognized that public "buy-in" is essential if we hope to protect our water future. The complete workgroup report and other documents on safe yield are available at: [cwagaz.org/reports.html](http://cwagaz.org/reports.html) under section C.

CWAG wants to make sure this latest safe yield report doesn't simply "sit on the shelf" like prior reports. Citizens can help by urging our elected officials to take the needed action.

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Today's column is the third in a series of guest columns. We invite your comments, questions and suggestions for future columns. Please send to [info@cwagaz.org](mailto:info@cwagaz.org). CWAG hosts a speaker on water issues on the second Saturday of each month at the Granite Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 882 Sunset. Learn more at [www.cwagaz.org](http://www.cwagaz.org).

*Howard Mechanic is chair of the Public Policy Committee of the Citizens Water Advocacy Group. He has served on the Safe Yield Subcommittee of the PAMA's Groundwater Users Advisory Committee and the coalition's Safe Yield Workgroup.*

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