

CWAG 2024 Candidate Forum Questions

Legislative District 1: General 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.

I. Within LD1, what are our most important water issues?

II. Big Chino Valley Groundwater Exports

A. Introduction: Arizona water law generally prohibits transferring water into Active Management areas. However, the Legislature authorized one locally important exception: the export of over 18,000 acre-feet per year (afy) from the Big Chino into the Prescott Active Management Area (PrAMA). The export includes the Big Chino Pipeline project and ground water from fallowed farmland. The base flow of the upper Verde River has now declined by two-thirds to approximately 10,000 afy. The Legislature has authorized more than enough groundwater export to dry up the river – without considering the extraordinary value of the Verde River.

B. Questions:

1. What are your concerns about further degrading or drying the upper Verde?
2. How do you intend to address your concerns?

III. Big Chino Mitigation

A. Introduction: In 2010, Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Salt River Project signed an “Agreement in Principle” in which the cities promised to mitigate any reductions in Verde River flow caused by their plans to export water from the Big Chino to Prescott using an expensive pipeline.

B. Questions:

1. What are your thoughts about building the pipeline?
2. Would you support adding the mitigation requirement into state law?
3. Should the state provide funding or loans to construct the pipeline?

IV. Rural Water Resource Management

- A. **Introduction:** Although Arizona State statutes grant counties numerous authorities enabling water management, our County Supervisors tell us that additional state authority is needed to enable rural counties to manage their water resources. Over the last few sessions, several good bills have been proposed (and supported by Yavapai County) but all have been denied committee hearings by two rural legislators, Gail Griffin and Sine Kerr, both representing Big Ag and the development industry.
- B. **Questions:**
1. Which do you believe is best able to manage rural water to meet local needs within guidelines set by ADWR: the state or rural counties? Please explain.
 2. How do you balance existing water rights (Big Ag and the development industry) with broader community needs, present and future?
 3. Please describe your impression of the water management efforts of the last legislative session.
 4. What will you do as a legislator to build consensus within the legislature and within Yavapai County to achieve bipartisan solutions to our rural water issues?

V. Rural Water Reporting

- A. **Introduction:** At present, ADWR lacks data on groundwater pumping in 87% of the state – a huge gap in critical water-demand information. You can't manage what you don't measure! For the last several legislative sessions, a worthy bill would have required wells outside of AMAs to report pumping over 10 afy (equivalent to over 20 domestic wells). The bill was denied committee hearings by two rural committee chairs, Gail Griffin and Sine Kerr, who were apparently responding to the objections of farmers who fear a "slippery slope" to regulation.
- B. **Questions:**
1. Do you support reporting requirements for large wells? Please explain..
 2. How do you balance fear of regulation with the need to better manage rural water?
 3. What can you do to assure that legislative leadership and committee chairs can no longer prevent committee hearings for worthy water bills?

VI. Water Quality

- A. **Introduction:** In 2020 the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) released a study showing that PFAS (a group of non-degradable chemicals) were frequently present in municipal water supply wells. The source of the PFAS is apparently a combination of airport firefighting chemicals, septic tanks, and treated municipal wastewater. **We have contaminated our groundwater aquifers.** To protect public health, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has now established maximum allowed levels for drinking water. These limits may require cities to install expensive filtration at the wellhead to clean our drinking water.
- B. **Questions:**
1. What can the State do to help municipal and private water suppliers deliver clean drinking water?
 2. Should state law prohibit polluting our aquifers with contaminated wastewater?
 3. Advanced Water Purification (AWP) technology is extremely effective in removal of PFAS and other contaminants. Do you see a role for AWP in municipal water supplies?

VII. Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR)

A. Introduction: ADWR is an administrative agency in the Executive branch of state government that is assigned many important water management tasks. Primarily, ADWR works to collect data, keep records, produce scientific groundwater models, regulate the Active Management Areas, and participate in Colorado River management. It does not “think out of the box” - no research and development is conducted. ADWR’s efforts are not focused on Yavapai County, or northern Arizona for that matter. When CWAG publicly asked ADWR Director Tom Buschatzke for help, he told CWAG “you’re on your own” because the agency does not have the needed resources.

B. Question:

1. Do you support increasing funding for ADWR to improve water management in rural Arizona? Please explain.
2. Should ADWR be directed to conduct research and development to improve water conservation and stormwater collection for recharge? Please explain.

VIII. Water Infrastructure Finance Authority (WIFA)

A. Introduction: The 2024 budget made deep cuts in WIFA funding (and other state agencies) that will eliminate or at least delay Arizona’s efforts to augment our water supply, improve water conservation, and assure water quality.

B. Question:

1. Do you agree with cutting funding for WIFA? How would you balance funding WIFA, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, and ADWR with other important needs?
2. Should Arizona adopt a statewide water conservation program that includes educational messaging, incentives for existing users, and requirements for new construction?