

**COCHISE GROUNDWATER STEWARDS**

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**Early October 2022 Newsletter**

The **C**ochise **G**roundwater **S**tewards are thankful that you have chosen to receive occasional emails from us and for your concern in preserving our *Groundwater* in the Sulphur Springs Valley.  We are a community based volunteer organization working for a sustainable water policy for all Cochise County.

Upcoming Action Opportunities:  (Please pass this information on to your friends and neighbors. )

1. **Register to Vote if you haven’t already done so. Deadline is Oct 11. Go to:** [**https://servicearizona.com/VoterRegistration/selectLanguage**](https://servicearizona.com/VoterRegistration/selectLanguage)
2. **Talk to as many neighbors, friends, total strangers as you can about what is happening with our groundwater and why you are voting YES for the AMAs (Willcox Basin/Proposition 420, Douglas Basin/Proposition 422). We need to get the word out NOW as early voting starts on October 12.**
3. **TAKE BACK CONTROL OF OUR GROUNDWATER -- VOTE YES for AMAs. VOTE YES on Propositions 420 and 422. Every vote counts!!**

**FYI**- **by Steve Kisiel**

**So Much Misinformation:** I just received the Publicity Pamphlet and Sample Ballot from Cochise County for the Willcox Basin AMA initiative. The pamphlet contains the Arguments For and Arguments Against this initiative. A similar pamphlet was sent to all registered voters in the Douglas Basin. I was one of six residents in the Willcox Basin who submitted an argument in favor of establishing an AMA. When I submitted my arguments in favor I had to sign an affidavit that the statements were true to the best of my knowledge and I took this pledge very seriously as did the other folks who submitted arguments in favor of the AMA propositions. Apparently the folks who submitted the arguments opposed to the AMAs did not let the affidavit stop them from including misinformation, half-truths and some outright falsehoods in their statements. Here is a sampling of the misinformation that was included in some of the opposition arguments:

* **“Agriculture accounts for approximately 62% of the GDP in this county”** – This same claim was in the first Farm Bureau mailer. We called them on it then and they have admitted that this number is not correct. The actual number is generally in the 1%-2% range from year to year. That’s a big difference and shows that we are not as dependent on agriculture as some might have you believe.
* **“The AMA will damage the development of alternative crops that could reduce water use”** – There is nothing explicit in the AMA structure that would discourage the use of low water use crops. In fact, the AMA can impose irrigation restrictions and incentives that would actually encourage more development of lower water use crops. This argument comes mostly from vineyard owners who have worked hard to develop a wine industry in the area. In the next newsletter we will provide a detailed response to the vineyard owners who have publicly come out against the AMAs.
* **“I do not believe there has been an adequate study of the Willcox/Douglas basins**” -- Actually the Willcox Basin is one of the most studied rural groundwater basins in the state. ADWR has produced a number of reports including a hydrological model in 2018 that projected significant declines in groundwater levels at the current rate of groundwater pumping. Depth to water data has been collected on many wells in these basins since the 1940s and the data shows steady declines in groundwater levels throughout both basins. We don’t need more studies to tell us our wells are going dry!
* **“The AMA will not stop the mining of the aquifer’s water by the large farms….It will actually make their water rights more permanent”** – First of all, without an AMA there is absolutely no limitation on how much groundwater any farm (large or small) can use and the mining of the aquifer’s water will continue to accelerate. The AMA will stop that acceleration as it freezes irrigated acres at current levels and initially assigns irrigation limitations on these acres based on historical use. When the AMA “grandfathers in” existing irrigated land that does not mean there is any “right” to a specified amount of water that can be used permanently. There seems to be a misconception that the “grandfathering in” and the “freeze” on irrigated acres locks in the amount of groundwater at the current use rate. In fact, the AMA has the authority to include irrigation reductions in their five year management plans (developed with public input). We would fully expect that the first management plan for the AMA will include irrigation reduction targets and incentives. Our group supports plans where these reductions are structured to target the highest intensity water users and provide incentives to shift toward lower water use crops. It’s just common sense that the targets should be aimed at the biggest per acre water users.
* **“An AMA may jeopardize our ability to apply for up to $250,000,000 in grants for alternative water solutions.” –** This one just defies credibility. First of all this is the amount of money allocated for grants across the whole state and is part of the Water Authority funding that was passed by the state legislature in July. Currently 80% of the state’s population lives within an existing AMA including Phoenix, Tucson, Prescott, and Casa Grande. We can’t find any provisions in this funding that would exclude or discourage grants from this funding going to areas within an AMA. We have water issues across the entire state and it just doesn’t make sense the state legislature would exclude any part of the state from this funding – especially all those AMA areas that currently include 80% of the state’s population. We will continue to research this claim and will update you if we find new information.

**There are many other misleading and sometimes false claims circulating out there about what the AMA will or won’t do. We have spent many hours over the past 18 months studying the available hydrology data for the Sulphur Springs Valley as well as the Groundwater Management Act which governs AMAs, INAs and all other groundwater provisions in Arizona. We have consulted with water policy lawyers, hydrologists and long time water activists throughout the state on these issues. We always strive to give you the most accurate information possible. Water policy is a very complex topic and the answers are rarely simple. Please reach out to us if you have any specific questions or anything you may not be sure about. The future of our groundwater is too important to base your vote on misinformation. Know the facts.**