

April 24, 2023 (original)

April 25, 2023 (corrected)

Honorable Governor Katie Hobbs
1700 W. Washington St.
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Members of the Legislature
Arizona State Capital Complex
1700 W. Washington St
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Mr. Thomas Buschatzke, Director
Arizona Department of Water Resources
1110 W. Washington St., Suite 310
Phoenix, AZ 85007

RE: Protection of the Willcox Groundwater Basin

Dear Governor Hobbs and Director Buschatzke,

We are all residents of the Willcox Groundwater Basin in eastern Cochise County who depend on the groundwater here to sustain our lives and our homes. We are writing to ask you to take action to address the serious groundwater challenges we are facing here.

Our groundwater basin is one of the most threatened in the state with an overdraft of 5 to 8 times the natural recharge, and consequently, we are experiencing rapidly declining water tables. Many of us have had to deepen our domestic wells at significant cost within the past 10 years and we can personally attest to declines in our water table of between 5-10 feet per year over the past 20 years. Some of us have been unable to afford to drill a new deeper well and are now having water hauled to our homes at a much higher monthly expense. We know neighbors who have moved elsewhere because of the declining water table. A few of us have been fortunate enough that our wells are still holding out but we know it is just a matter of time before we too have to deepen our wells or move on.

Many of us moved here at a time when the groundwater withdrawals were more in balance with the natural recharge and the annual declines in the water table were much smaller. The situation has changed dramatically in the past 25 years primarily driven by an estimated 50% increase in agricultural irrigation. Without any groundwater protections in place (as is the case in much of rural Arizona) there is a literal "free for all" where only those with the deepest pockets and the deepest wells will survive. It is time to stop the depletion of the Willcox Basin and put measures in place to sustainably manage our precious groundwater throughout all of rural Arizona.

Given the current groundwater situation in the Willcox Basin we urge you to take the following actions:

- 1) We ask Governor Hobbs to prioritize the passage of the Local Groundwater Stewardship Area bill (HB2731/SB1306). Despite having broad bipartisan support among leaders across much of rural Arizona, this bill was not scheduled for a committee hearing earlier in the current

legislative session. The time is long overdue that the political leadership in Arizona addressed the serious groundwater issues throughout much of rural Arizona and enacted legislation tailored to the specific needs of rural communities. The LGSA bill has incorporated significant input from officials and concerned citizens from rural areas across the state, including here in the Willcox Basin. There are a number of provisions within this legislation that make it a better fit for rural Arizona than the current AMA related statutes. The LGSA legislation addresses at least three significant issues that contributed to the November 2022 defeat of the AMA referendum in the Willcox Basin. First, it provides specific measures that increase local control and input for the groundwater management process. Second, it provides more flexibility concerning transferability of irrigation allocations (an AMA currently has no flexibility in moving an irrigation allocation to another parcel within a basin which was a significant reason many Willcox area winegrowers were opposed to the AMA). Third, it provides a process for ending the LGSA if it is no longer needed.

- 2) We ask Director Buschatzke to initiate an INA/AMA designation process for the Willcox Groundwater Basin as authorized in ARS 45-412, ARS 45-432, and ARS-45-433. We ask the Director to initiate this process as soon as possible in recognition of the significant overdraft and the ongoing and growing decline in the depth to water throughout this basin. We understand that initiation of this process will put a hold on any new irrigation until the process is completed. We are supportive of the LGSA legislation but in the event that it is not passed in this legislative session the urgency of the situation here means we need to fall back on the existing provisions within Title 45 to stop the depletion of our aquifer. We were encouraged by the Director’s recent INA designation for the Hualapai Basin and hope our request will get the same serious consideration.

- 3) In the event that the Local Groundwater Stewardship Area (LGSA) bill is passed and signed by the Governor prior to completion of the INA/AMA designation process, we ask Director Buschatzke to consider initiating the process to designate the Willcox Groundwater Basin an LGSA as we believe it would be the preferred solution by the majority of residents here since it clearly addresses a number of objections voters here had with an AMA(see item #1). As currently written the LGSA includes a provision authorizing the ADWR Director to take such action.

We appreciate your careful consideration of our concerns.

Respectfully submitted by the following 127 Willcox Basin Residents,

Steven C. Kisiel, Pearce, AZ	Cheryl Knott, Pearce, AZ
Lucia M. Kisiel, Pearce, AZ	Elaine Santo, Pearce, AZ
Karen Sartain, Pearce, AZ	Jessica Dilworth, Pearce, AZ
Jeff Sartain, Pearce, AZ	Robin Peterson, Pearce, AZ
Melanie Lawrence, Cochise, AZ	Jessica Jones, Pearce, AZ
Lou Manuta, Pearce, AZ	Moira Hagerlin, Pearce, AZ
Janet Manuta, Pearce, AZ	Vince Hagerlin, Pearce, AZ
John Graffio, Pearce, AZ	Tanya Bok, Cochise, AZ

Terry Kleber, Pearce, AZ	Jim Soderquist, Cochise, AZ
Dianne Kleber, Pearce, AZ	Karen Bogner, Pearce, AZ
James Amayi-Kelley, Cochise, AZ	Jim Verner, Pearce, AZ
Anneke Meyer, Dragoon, AZ	Katherine Brown, Cochise, AZ
Damon Bostrom, Pearce, AZ	Dan Clark, Dragoon, AZ
Joanne Weiner, Cochise, AZ	Hazard Hawk, Cochise, AZ
Lisa Glenn, Willcox, AZ	Deborah Hawk, Cochise, AZ
Lloyd Glenn, Willcox, AZ	Claudia Lunden, Cochise, AZ
Timothy Austin, Cochise, AZ	Paul Lunden, Cochise, AZ
Donna F. Brown, Pearce, AZ	Glenn Klingler, Cochise, AZ
Gary F. Brown, Pearce, AZ	Martha Klingler, Cochise, AZ
Kathy Carter, Willcox, AZ	William McElroy, Cochise, AZ
Stuart Carter, Willcox, AZ	Jessica Stanley, Cochise, AZ
Therese Arsenault, Willcox, AZ	Denise Greene, Pearce, AZ
Gary Baker, Pearce, AZ	Todd Schmidt, Pearce, AZ
Rona Baker, Pearce, AZ	Vance Williams, Pearce, AZ
Marie-Paule Shiver, Pearce, AZ	Billie Jo Cross, Pearce, AZ
Ellen Cohen, Dragoon, AZ	Tom Spierings, Pearce, AZ
Kay Nelson, Willcox, AZ	Angela Spierings, Pearce, AZ
Mike Nelson, Willcox, AZ	Marc Boutte, Dragoon, AZ
Sharon Arthur, Cochise, AZ	Berta Margarita Acosta, Cochise, AZ
Tracy Caras, Dragoon, AZ	Ann Spaulding, Dragoon, AZ
Peter Caras, Dragoon, AZ	Robert Brooks, Dragoon, AZ
Tricia Buck-Messinger, Cochise, AZ	Victoria Brand, Pearce, AZ
Eric L. Messinger, Cochise, AZ	Jeffrey Brand, Pearce, AZ
Michael T. Buck, Cochise, AZ	Monica Mize, Cochise, AZ
Kayleen Buck, Cochise, AZ	Cherrie Brinlee, Cochise, AZ
John R. Miller, Dragoon, AZ	Carrie A. Jones, Cochise, AZ
Samuel J. Klein, Cochise, AZ	Jason M. Jones, Cochise, AZ
Caila A. Block, Cochise, AZ	Robert Fino, Pearce, AZ
Edie Kincaid, Cochise, AZ	Sandra Perona-Fino, Pearce, AZ
Arthur Earl Kincaid, Cochise, AZ	Carolyn Lukensmeyer, Pearce, AZ
Rodolfo Antonio Poe, Cochise, AZ	Daniel Sacco, Pearce, AZ
James Zachary Jones, Cochise, AZ	Patricia Sacco, Pearce, AZ
Lora Ann Chiehowsky, Cochise, AZ	Karen Weilacher, Cochise, AZ
Luke Zachary Jones Chiehowsky, Cochise, AZ	Gretchen Hanson, Pearce, AZ
Laurette LeVine, Willcox, AZ	William Dillavou, Cochise, AZ
Mark LeVine, Willcox, AZ,	Kay Dillavou, Cochise, AZ
Jeanie Mudd, Pearce, AZ	Jody Telfair-Richards, Pearce, AZ
Jeff Bernard, Pearce, AZ	Sally Newland, Pearce, AZ
Judy Bernard, Pearce, AZ	Gail Gelardi, Cochise, AZ
David Buchanan, Cochise, AZ	Sharon Gibson, Pearce, AZ
Ioana Datcu, Pearce, AZ	Robin Cruickshank, Pearce, AZ
Susan Houser, Pearce, AZ	Joanne Richardson, Cochise, AZ
Frederick W. Skillman, Cochise, AZ	Kathleen Johnston, Willcox, AZ
Carol M. Skillman, Cochise, AZ	Willis Johnston, Willcox, AZ
Talena DeBaun, Pearce, AZ	Stephanie Johnston, Cochise, AZ
Leon Hansen, Willcox, AZ	David Johnston, Cochise, AZ

Karla Hansen, Willcox, AZ	Pat Vicario, Pearce, AZ
Janet Randall, Willcox, AZ	Jeanie Vicario, Pearce, AZ
Joan Nomides, Pearce, AZ	Larry Jordan, Pearce, AZ
Alexis Nomides, Pearce, AZ	Kent Andrew Shaver, Willcox, AZ
Gary L. Taylor, Willcox, AZ	Norah Shaver, Willcox, AZ
Maria P. Taylor, Willcox, AZ	Shannon Brown, Willcox, AZ
Beatrice Josefina Reja	Vickie Brown, Willcox, AZ