

NEWS RELEASE

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A Conservation Vision for Arizona's Water Future 27 Groups and Hundreds of Individuals Commit to Protecting Environmental Waters

Phoenix, AZ – Arizonans concerned about the critical need for the state to enact policies and programs to protect flowing rivers and streams are stepping forward with a new vision for water in Arizona. The focus is a future where all citizens can live comfortable, economically secure lives with good jobs, and enjoy healthy natural areas with flowing rivers and springs, healthy riparian habitats, vigorous wildlife, and recreational opportunities. To sustain our lives and environment for the future, we need sustainable water policies.

"This working group is made up of people who are committed to protecting our water security for the long term, and who insist that a broad and diverse set of voices be at the table when crafting water policy," said Steve Kozachik, Tucson City Councilmember. "This issue is far too important to allow policy to be driven without a strong conservation ethic being reflected in the dialogue."

The groups seek to inform, educate, and advocate for changes in water policies at the state and local level, noting that Arizona needs to achieve a sustainable water future through effective management that controls surface water and groundwater use in a manner that can be maintained for an indefinite time, without causing unacceptable environmental, economic, or social consequences. To achieve that, water users – farmers and ranchers, cities and towns, tribal communities, business and industry, environmental interests and everyday people – must work together to better manage our water resources.

"The window of opportunity to better manage our water resources is closing quickly – groundwater responds slowly both to stresses and improved management," said Karen Fogas, executive director for Tucson Audubon Society. "Once a perennial stream or river dries up for part of the year or for certain stretches, species disappear and the ecological integrity of the system is degraded. We must act now to reduce additional permanent damage from unsustainable water use."

The state of Arizona and the greater Southwest is experiencing prolonged drought conditions. This is exemplified by Arizona's Drought Emergency Declaration, which has been in effect since 1999. While drought appears to have recently broken in neighboring California, Arizona's waterways and their tributaries continue to see diminished flows. This spring and early summer, flows were well-below normal for the Upper San Pedro River, the Upper Gila River, as well as on the Salt and Verde Rivers. A key aspect of the Conservation Vision points to the need to consider environmental water needs and propose policies to keep rivers, streams, and springs flowing.

"Arizona's water laws need to be modernized, in consultation with a broad spectrum of interests," said Cary Meister, Conservation Chair of Yuma Audubon Society. "We should strive to simplify water law,

address rural Arizona's water issues, integrate the best available science and refocus on sustainability with a strong emphasis on conservation, reuse, and the environment."

A Sustainable Water Workgroup has been convened to propose policies that will prevent further degradation of Arizona's rivers, lakes and springs and find new ways to balance Arizona's water interests. New statewide policies should integrate the management of groundwater and surface water and ensure restoration of environmental flows, or non-degradation of current environmental flows. We are committed to including a broad range of stakeholders (both large and small) in the discussion, including our cities and towns, rural communities, Indian tribes, grassroots and community groups, local businesses, and the environmental community.

To read more about the Arizona Sustainable Water Workgroup and the conservation vision, go to <https://azwaterfuture.org/>.

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